THE ART OF THE NOVELIST

HENRY BURROWES LATHROP

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THE ART OF THE NOVELIST

Revised Edition

BY

HENRY BURROWES LATHROP

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PREFACE

This book is for novel-readers. It is meant for those who have unreflectively and sympathetically read so many novels that they have begun to think about them, who have lived within the realm of the story-teller long enough to have some standards and ideals of their own, but have not defined these standards and ideals and thought them out into clear consciousness. Some such readers may find satisfaction in carrying further this reflective appreciation until they attain a more rounded and balanced view of the novelist's art. The author has no idea of indicating the way of approach to novels. Nothing, as Tieck says, is more destructive to sound literary judgment than to begin the study of works of literary art by the way of a premature philosophy, instead of by direct and ample experience, in instinctive obedience to the genius of the masters. Yet to many a reader there comes a time when he feels that he must add to that best and highest

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delight of frank imaginative sharing in the author's vision some definiteness in his view of great works, a definiteness which may contribute not merely to the enjoyment but to the appreciative understanding of the achievement of the creative mind, and which may make more secure the reader's discrimination between what is great and what is merely fine, between what is solid and what is veneered, between what is noble in spite of faults and what is radically defective in spite of brilliance. Thoughtful readers sooner or later find it not enough to be plunged in the delight of books; they wish also to discern, compare, and judge. The author of the present book does not believe that such a temper is at all inconsistent with a naïve or even childish delight in a good story, for after years of reading novels and systematically thinking about them, he can still lose himself in a good story, and finds his youthful appetite for marvel unimpaired, so that as Clive Newcome says of dinners, "All are good, but some are better than others." Now if this be true of the Professor, the dry stick, why will it not be even more true of the unacademic reader, the green twig?

The present writer makes bold to claim some

authority as an elder soldier in speaking with his comrade readers; but he is not bold enough to give any commands to writers. In truth, he is not sure that he knows how to write a novel, having never tried. And the writer of fiction, even if he has the receipt of a successful novel, can hardly be hopeful of telling more than how he supposes himself to have succeeded. If there is one thing more certain than another, it is that there are many ways of literary excellence. The novelist is privileged to belong to a literary sect; but the critic must be catholic, and have no creed not generally necessary to salvation. It is the hope of the writer that no reader will be led by this book to be unfriendly or inhospitable to any type of excellence.

There are, of course, many works in the field which this book enters. More than two hundred in English are enumerated in the list by N. L. Goodrich in *Bulletin of Bibliography* (Vol. iv. p. 118; Vol. v. p. 79, 1906-1908).

Most of these studies dwell upon the moral qualities, or else on the technique of the novelist. It is the object of the present work to bring into the foreground the fundamental elements of excellence—native imagination, the

temperament of the writer, and the fortunateness of his conception. It is in the nature of the man that the weight of his book consists—in the seriousness of his passion as to the universal in things, and the force of his intellect in reflection upon them. It is in the imaginative intensity of his vision that truth and unity consist. It is on the *idea,* the fundamental conflict, the radical paradox, that interest must primarily depend. Craftsmanship, though necessary to realize these things, cannot make up for the lack of them. Yet it is upon craftsmanship, being obvious and teachable, that an analysis such as this book undertakes is likely to insist. It is my hope that I may help some readers to penetrate deeper than they otherwise might into the spirit of great novels.

Though the illustrative references to novels run over a wide range, they are intentionally made in the main to familiar works of established reputation. The author has felt at liberty occasionally to illustrate or reinforce his points by reference to other forms of literature than the novel. The ways of art are one in spirit, though many in form. Some readers will observe the absence of a chapter on style. Upon style, the author finds himself unable to

say anything interesting which is not individual to particular authors. No doubt, readers of flexible and sensitive literary appreciation will be likely to feel as if that were true of all generalizations about forms of art. I hope no one will say, however, as Goldsmith said of Kames's *Elements of Criticism,* that it is easier to write such a book than to read it, for that would indeed make the lot of my readers unenviable!

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The only change made in this edition is the addition of a sketchy chapter touching upon some points in the development of the novel. This chapter, like the rest of the book, will attain its object if it is not useless to the serious but inexperienced reader.

Madison, Wisconsin,
August, 1927.

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THE ART OF THE NOVELIST

CHAPTER I

THE NOVEL IN MODERN LIFE

Year by year throughout the last forty years, the mass of novels and tales printed in the English language has been overwhelmingly greater than the whole number of any other class of books. In 1913, the last year of the distant world before the great war began in Europe, there were more than 8600 new books printed in the British Isles; and of this total, more than 1200 were works of prose fiction;—almost one in seven of the whole number. In 1912, the proportion was from one in six to one in five. Dragging at a long distance behind come works of theology and religion, their place challenged sometimes by scientific books, sometimes by histories, and occasionally in very recent years by sociological works. Moreover, the dominance of prose fiction is a recent phenomenon; it belongs, as has been said, to the last forty years. From

1870 to 1875, the number of new books yearly printed in the British Isles was about 3400 or 3500. Of this total, in 1870 two hundred were novels, and three hundred and fifty, or nearly twice as many, were religious and theological books. Four years later over five hundred were novels; about four hundred and eighty—not quite so many—were religious books; and since that year, with but a few slight, temporary, preliminary hesitations, the flood of prose fiction has risen until the watcher on the shore trembles for fear everything is to be engulfed.

It was not always thus. If all the books printed in English before 1850 were gathered in one library, by far the most spacious compartment would be heaped with service books, volumes of theology and devotion, works of the church fathers. Indeed, everything used to be theological; the existence of witches and the right of kings and the nature of poetry were all treated under the guise of aspects of doctrine, of the law of the church, or of Christian morals. Early in the eighteenth century, some graduates of Harvard College found their library so exclusively theological that they determined to reform it and to modify its proportions. They were shocked and amazed, and not unnaturally

so; but the condition of things at Harvard was not the exception. It was the case everywhere, an inevitable result of the condition of society at the time of the invention of printing and of the religious struggles which had convulsed the world ever since. By their time the world had changed; and the feelings of these Harvard graduates constituted but one symbol manifesting the victory of the secular over the ecclesiastical view of life, a victory of which many other phenomena of modern times are also symbols—among them the multitude of modern novels.

Go now into the public library of any American town. The number of stacks devoted to prose fiction increases and overflows and is increased again. The public librarian is never quite at ease about his fiction circulation. On the one hand, he wishes the books in his library to be read, to be read fully and with delight; he is glad to provide entertainment, even amusement, and to do his part toward creating

"Joy in widest commonalty spread."

On the other hand, he is always afraid of being in effect the enemy of the noblest joys, of making the circulation of commonplace books, even

good books, drive out the best books. He supports general literature and informing books by all kinds of subtle and canny devices; but the figures of circulation will only budge a little way. He is obliged to struggle in order to keep the circulation of his fiction nearer two-thirds than three-fourths of the total; and if he keeps the fiction under sixty per cent, he is inclined to plume himself, and rouses in the minds of other librarians the suspicion that he is coercing his public. The novel, as these facts show, commands the public interest quite as decidedly as it predominates in bulk of production and in the number of separate works.

Novels, printed by tens or twenties in each year from 1750 to 1820, are now produced at the rate of a score a week. If it is true—as is most certain—that in the history of printed books is to be found the vital history of modern thought and feeling, then the increase in the production of novels is one of the notable facts of the last hundred years. How and by what steps, by what advances, sudden or gradual, did it take place? The first great upward step came suddenly, between 1820 and 1830. In the former year, as Professor Masson reasonably estimates in his *British Novelists,*

there were about twenty-five long works of prose fiction, mainly novels, published in England;—one a fortnight. The number had been practically constant for some years. All at once the annual total starts up—in 1830 reaching at least a hundred and one, or two a week, and at that point remains practically unchanged for nearly thirty years,—in 1850 being about a hundred, in 1856 about ninety. The reason of this leap forward, as Professor Masson believes, was the successful example of Sir Walter Scott.

The great writers of realistic prose fiction before the day of Scott,—Cervantes, Le Sage, Fielding, Richardson,—had poured a complete life into a vast book, the spacious expression of a whole experience, and incapable of being repeated, though Fielding and Le Sage made the effort to do twice what can be done only once. Scott shortened novels, set the example of composing a library, made novel-writing a business, and has been followed by a multitude of facile and industrious smaller men, and by some as great as himself or greater. The world has now Trollope and Zola and Dickens and Balzac, in place of Suarez and Thomas and Bull and the Bollandists. Scott created a

profession for such men as G. P. R. James and Harrison Ainsworth. For two generations after he had showed the way, nearly every man of letters wrote a historical novel;—not only novelists by occupation like Bulwer and Reade, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot, but critics like Lockhart, and polemic divines like Cardinal Newman and Charles Kingsley. Even the poets felt the impulse to compose historical fiction based on "documents." Tennyson wrote the *Idylls of the King,* Browning the *Ring and the Book.* The historians, Macaulay and Carlyle, Thierry and Michelet, strove to write their histories as picturesquely as Scott had written his novels. And the novels even when not historical imitated the novels of Scott in the breadth, the social contrasts, the ample and highly coloured setting, with which they represented the manners of their own age.

Some fifty years later, the yearly "output" of novels began once again to increase, at first slowly, then with steady progress, and then with a triumphant and startling leap ahead. The approximate figures illustrating this advance to leadership between 1870 and 1880, and the even more striking increase since then have already been given. The annual num-

ber of religious works remains pretty constant; that of scientific and historical and social works increases almost to an equality with them; but fiction remains far in the lead. The influence of the war, indeed, has cut down the novels as it has other luxuries,—from 1226 in 1913 to 1014 in 1914, and to 755 in 1918; but it has not yet brought fiction to the level of serious subjects. The novel still is dominant.

The causes of the second great increase in the yearly product of British prose fiction are associated with the general progress of industrial democracy: cheapened processes of mechanical reproduction, the diffusion of an elementary education, the increased leisure of hand workers and small merchants, diminished seriousness. In part at least, the popular novel is created to satisfy the demand for an inexpensive slothful entertainment, requiring no activity of the body, no energy of the reason, and small effort of the imagination. Novels are obviously easier than croquet, or than bridge. They are easier than poetry because the novel reader does not have to create an imaginary world very different from the actuality about him. The only thing easier than the novel is the "movies." Again, the

progress of manufacture cheapens everything, including books. Novels are reproduced inexpensively, like other works of art: carpets, musical records, half-tones, mechanical wood carvings, and plaster casts. Most people can buy novels, and those who cannot buy them can borrow them from the public library. In addition, everybody now learns to read and write; and a "reading public" has been created. This is not an educated public, not a public trained to give energetic, continuous attention to serious ideas, or disciplined in taste by acquaintance with creations of high literary quality, but a public energetically devoted to practical affairs and material comfort, decent, bustling, and superficial. The reading matter of such a public must be fit for the minds of the readers. When Addison, two hundred years ago, rejoiced that he had brought philosophy from "closets and libraries to tea-tables and coffee-houses," he might have added that it was a tea-table and coffee-house philosophy which he had brought. The philosophy of hard thinking remained the occupation of the lonely scholar; it abode in "closets and libraries." Two generations later Dr. Johnson remarked on the existence of the "middle

class of scholars, who read for amusement," as a comparatively new fact in English history. These "middle scholars," the "general readers," constituted the public addressed through the publisher, and their purchases of books made the writing of books a possible means of livelihood for a small body of men of letters. Never before the eighteenth century had this been the case. The honoraria of individual patrons had supported poets; a share of the entrance fees to the playhouse had rewarded playwrights, sometimes munificently; political preferments and pensions had been freely granted to party writers; and some journalists of all work like l'Estrange and Defoe had made a living by their pens; but not till the time of Johnson, Goldsmith, and Smollett does literature as a business emerge in definite shape from the limbo of formlessness. In this day not alone the "middle," but the "lower" scholars are addressed in print, still less capable than Addison's "fair sex," or Johnson's Myrtilla of steady thought, or of delicate reserves, and too often dulled by the habitual over-emphasis of headline and cartoon, of rapid reel pictures, and of big print and capitals in newspaper editorials. The reading

public of the day, moreover, is not so serious as the reading public of a hundred, or of fifty years ago. It does not live, as readers used to live, under the influence of a grave theology,—or of any theology. It reads for entertainment; and if the book does not provide entertainment, there are plenty of forms of superficial gaiety to take its place. Finally, a very large proportion of general readers are young;—juvenile though not children, and immature in mind and experience. It is a remark of Mr. Leland T. Powers, the well-known public reader, that all audiences are sixteen years old. Nearly the same thing may be said of the mixed public which reads for entertainment.

Market novels, however, are not of so much interest to the student of literature as of sociology; they are the creation of business, not of art; made to meet a demand, not to reveal a vision. "Let us not spend words upon them, but do thou look, and pass on"—pass to the greater novels, the most ample expression of the modern spirit in letters. The novel has been the chosen form of expression for the highest literary genius manifested in Russia during the nineteenth century; in this form has

spoken genius as high as any displayed in England or France; and in all these countries and Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries the novel has occupied a throng of men endowed with brilliant talents and only next in achievement to the great creators of the first rank. How different would the nineteenth century be without Scott and Dickens, Balzac and Hugo, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

One reason for the popularity of the novel is that it is a loose and flexible form of literature,—that its field has no definite boundaries, so that one steps easily into drama, history, or romance, while yet the novel has a distinguishable norm and a central tendency.

Of the forms of art current in our own day the novel is most like the drama. Both tell stories, have to do with individuals, and give a view of social life. In both, the narration is developed by the play of character upon character, and there is, commonly, in a novel much dialogue, with occasional passages as continuous as on the stage. Novels are perpetually turned into plays, and plays are now and then made into novels. Many novels of recent years, moreover, resemble plays more closely than older novels commonly do, in that they

deal with sharply defined transactions, and have comparatively few characters, move rapidly, and admit no digressions or episodes. Yet the novel and the drama essentially differ in spirit; or else why is the dramatized work of fiction nearly always a faulty play, faulty in proportion as it adheres to the manner of its narrative original? Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities,* dramatized as *The Only Way,* had first of all to be introduced by a prologue scene, taking place many years before the beginning of the real action, and only useful to afford an explanation of the events which followed; and then, when the play really began, it had sometimes to sprawl and sometimes to leap from scene to scene without clear connection and solid progress, mystifying all spectators except those who were prepared by having read the novel beforehand. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* dramatized as *Becky Sharp,* lost all its weight of slow and inevitable progress in Becky's life, by becoming dramatically sharp and rapid; and in the climax scene, the most famous stroke of Thackeray's genius,—that by which Becky is made for once to admire her husband when he strikes down Lord Steyne,—was inevitably lost upon the audience, being too intimate and

too psychological to be represented on the stage. Scott's novels, one by one, Dickens's novels, one by one, were adapted to the theatre in their day. The novels are still read; *Oliver Twist* has been successfully "picturized"; but who hears of the play of *Rob Roy?*

Even sharply defined dramatic novels ordinarily lack the obvious and striking external action requisite for clearness on the stage. Even Miss Austen's brilliant high social comedy in *Pride and Prejudice,* or Trollope's bold humour in *Barchester Towers* would never do; not even Elizabeth though she routs Lady de Bourgh so gallantly, or Mrs. Proudie though she calls so grandly on Mr. Stanhope to "Unhand it, Sir!" is quite a theatrical figure.

On the whole, the typical, the characteristic novel is on a broader scale and covers an ampler field than the play. It tolerates a slowness of movement, a fulness of detail, a completeness of explanation, a psychological fineness, a subtlety and delicacy of effect and a distribution of emphasis, which are at least not normal on the stage.

Of older types of creative literature the novel most clearly approaches the epic. The

epic tells an ample story about a large transaction, with a throng of actors in a spacious world. It is the panorama of a whole society; and though it has its main hero and its central plot, it is tolerant of episodes, and reaches no single or central climax. So there is an epic novel, easy, generous, which tells a single story about a single hero, but sees him against an extensive background of various life, and reaches more than one climax of interest. Such are *Tom Jones, Middlemarch,* and *Henry Esmond.* Yet though near akin to the epic—and the resemblances have been merely suggested—the novel has its own field. It is in prose, not in verse; and it is accordingly prosaic. That is, the novel has less exaltation and intensity than the epic; it deals with ordinary men, not with heroes, it is relatively diffuse, and more freely admits humour;—in its incidents, in its characters, and in its style. The "mere English" reader accustomed to prose translations of the Iliad and Beowulf may not easily feel the difference between the tone and style of verse and prose in the epic; but nothing critical can be more certain than that the epic narrative loses an essential part of its lofty and tragic tone, and degenerates

toward a mere romance by exchanging the orderly form and the energy of verse for the relative looseness and tameness of prose.

But the novel comes closer to real life than the epic, or even than the realistic drama. The epic cannot abandon its monarchs and outstretched heroes, and record fully the chaff of a group of street labourers; its home is in the great days of old, and it cannot live in today, in the lodging-house of Mme. Vauquer, or Mrs. Todgers, or Hilda Lessways. As for the drama, it must be instant in effect, continually in motion, and obvious. Not all human situations have these qualities in a degree sufficient to make them effective on the stage. Students of stagecraft, both theorists and practical playwrights, remark on the small number of possible dramatic situations. Mr. Bernard Shaw is believed to be very original, but he declares that his whole dramatic craftsmanship consists in dressing up old situations anew. This disclaimer may be one of his whims, his paradoxes. But M. George Polti, in his little book, *Les trente-six situations dramatiques,* found it difficult to rediscover the "thirty-six tragic situations" declared by Gozzi to exist, and only succeeded in reaching the number by split-

ting up some categories. Schiller worked hard to find more but could not discover so many. No doubt it is only in the bare formula that dramatic situations are alike, and no doubt a relatively few formulas would cover the plan of most novels. Yet the novel is less restricted than the stage; it may be slower, more intimate, and more subtle. In addition, it is freer in its point of view than the drama, because it need not so scrupulously consider prepossessions, national or other. If a man does not like a novel, he need not read it; somebody else may. But at the play, an outraged minority are likely to raise a row and spoil a performance. From an outraged majority there is no appeal. Then the novel approaches history: the record of the actual. Some novelists believe they are striving to reproduce it raw; they speak of a *slice* of life; sometimes a slice of *quivering* life. They operate; they vivisect. Again, some novels are designed to make the reader feel as if he were actually watching the confusing procession of many people through a large world. Tolstoy purposes in *War and Peace* to give the vast impression of the Napoleonic War in Russia; Zola sees all Rome and strives to represent

whole generations of French life in his gigantic kinetoscope.

Yet in even these novels the central interest is not in the continued activity of a group or organization of human beings, as that of history is,—not in the life of a country, or a church, or a corporation,—but of individuals. A mere piece of fictitious history would be no novel. There are such—as the *Adventures of a Cavalier*—and it is recorded that the tale deceived Lord Chatham. He was not gratified to think that he had been under the spell of a clever writer of fiction, but angered at being deceived by a trick.

The novel, so far as it approaches the actual, is rather a biography than a history. As a merely fictitious biography it has been conceived by Defoe, who wrote works so full of natural detail, often trivial, that they produce the impression of being a transcript of events. But less ideal than poetry, less systematically patterned than a play, the novel is yet in spirit nearer to them than to a mere literal illusion of fact. A book published during the Spanish-American War of 1898 placed its hero on a transport ship of the United States, which pursued a very erratic course,—

touching at Honolulu, blown by storms to Vladivostok, breaking down and taking refuge in Yokohama. The narrative was accompanied by pseudo-documents, and had little or nothing of plot; it was ingenious, made up by study and labour, not by the imagination, to seem a record of fact. It was an annoying trick. But the normal novel is not a trick or deceit; it is a creation. Like other imaginative creations, it is real within its world, but that is not the world of actual events. As when we watch the play of *Lear,* we feel terror, wrath, grief, and pity, and yet we do not intervene to prevent the outrages which occur in this mimic world, knowing well that a fateful control of that which takes place on the stage is beyond the reach of our intervention, within a bounded world of which we are spectators but in which we cannot act, so when we read a novel, we believe in its events just as much as we do in the events of the play; but we know that what happens is created by another power than that of fact; we know that we are looking in upon a vision, however compelling a vision. Thus the novel, though in its nature not so far removed from actuality as a poem or a play, is yet removed from it. In particular, it mani-

fests tendencies and laws of life more distinctly realized than does actual life. Actual life exhibits the tendencies of character and of events; but it does not carry them through to realization; other characters and events inhibit them. Thus imaginative creation is more "philosophical" than fact, as Aristotle intimates, because it rests on fundamental tendencies, and is thoroughgoing in carrying them out. As related then to the pseudo-biography or the pseudo-history, which produces the illusion of reality without imaginative unity, the novel is written in the spirit of creative art.

Yet here again the creative freedom of the novelist is limited and controlled more rigidly than that of any other "poet." He may not imagine a world frankly governed by other laws of nature than this one:—a world peopled by beings six inches high, or in which the youngest son by glowering at the ashes becomes fitted to go forth and win the hand of a princess after his elder brothers have failed. These are fairy tales; on a large scale they are romances: that is, narratives of a world more brilliant, more highly coloured, or more entertainingly improbable than the normal world, but not

so systematically ideal and beautiful as the world of high poetry. Yet the line between the novel and the romance is a finer one and harder to draw than that between the novel and the pretended history. The accentuation of special aspects of life which is essential in all fiction in order to give it interest easily leads to the securing of interest by making the laws of the world of the novel a little different from those of this world. Hence the novels of Sir Walter Scott have something of a romantic formula: a stupid well-meaning Waverley is restored to fortune by a mysterious packet; six healthy brothers die by various kinds of violent death in six months so that a stupid well-meaning Frank Osbaldistone may marry Diana Vernon. Likewise naughty achieving characters,—Vich Ian Vohr, Rob Roy,—are given a kind of charm above that of common men, and the events of common life are presented as more free from monotony than they usually are. It is plain, however, that Scott's romantic tendencies diverge from the normal course of the novel, that the novel, though somehow livelier than life, is contained within a more ordinary probability than the formula of *Waverley* or *Ivanhoe* or *Rob Roy*.

But not even yet, not by recognizing the novel as an attempt in narrative form to subject the creative imagination in its dealings with human character and experience to the laws of normal possibility have we considered the novel on all sides. The novel has to give room enough for the working out of a tolerably extended transaction, or the development of a character through a considerable experience, or the presentation of a substantial social order. It is not a short story.

This is not a merely mechanical question. Think of any satisfactory short story,—for example *The Black Cat.* The characters are really formed when the story begins; the transaction performed is not only single, but relatively simple, brief, and in order to justify itself surprising, and for most readers none the worse for being fantastic. An exaggeration resulting from brevity, a heightened tone, some tension, like that of the stage, belong to the short story. Or in that other and more beautiful type, that of Turgenev, in which a single idyllic mood is presented, there is a definite elevation of tone, a lyric sentiment approaching poetry, and incapable of being extended to the scale of a novel. The genius

of the short story writer and of the novelist are in essence different, and it is rarely indeed that a writer has excelled in both forms.

In the novels of those who have most genuinely succeeded in both novels and short stories there is generally a sense of effort, of an attempt to be perpetually exciting, of a tension above the normal ease of a large conception. Stevenson, for example, never outgrew the limits of the short story, though he was tending away from them and *Weir of Hermiston* promises greatly. Between the novel of full length and the short story there are compromises, intermediate types: novelettes, often charming, in which the novelist's type of genius is at work, without exerting itself upon material demanding its full energy; *Silas Marner* is an example of the short novel. All of George Eliot's *Tales of Clerical Life* are of the novelist's type, not of the tale-teller's. They would perhaps have been better if there had been room in them to explain the characters. But Kipling's *Kim,* on the other hand, is a series of short stories,—finely cut gems strung by an expert jeweler on a single thread.

The typical novel, then, is a tolerably long piece of narrative prose fiction dealing in the

spirit of creative art with the fortunes of individual persons in the normal world. At every point it may tend to pass its boundaries, and to annex the territory of other forms;—to grow crisp, or to become impressionistic, or to rise to idealism, or to get high-coloured, or to preach, or to lose accent and vivacity, but in so far as it does any of these things, it departs from the normal tendency of the novel as a type.

The most important fact about it is that it tells an imagined story, like the romance, the drama, and the epic; and its relations with these other forms of imaginative literature are the most illuminating aspects of the novel for us to consider.

The novel, the epic of common life, the fiction in which the imagination creates characters but accepts the world in which they live, is a creation of modern times, approached in France, Spain, and Germany in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, foreshadowed in Italy still earlier, but first definitely formed in England during the eighteenth century. In its modernness, the novel is unique among considerable literary types. The Greeks, who discovered the intellectual life, discovered and

brought to classical perfection nearly all forms of prose and verse. Epic poetry, tragedy and comedy, lyric and elegy, epigram and idyl, history and oratory, philosophy and criticism;—why should the Greeks have missed inventing novels? Homer and Sophocles and Demosthenes are read in school and college. Even those who read no Greek, and perhaps know no more than the names of a few Attic writers accept the conventions and follow the ideals of style which succeeded in establishing themselves in Athens some centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. Why is there no Greek novelist? For the Greek romances of the decadence, however interesting to the student of fiction, are not entitled to the name, and have their origin in a different kind of interest. Likewise the stories which have reached us from ancient Egypt, the tales of Roman decadence, the fiction of Arabia and India and mediaeval Europe are not novels in form or akin to novels in spirit. Their chief delight is in pure marvel, in the escape from probability; not in this world but in an invented world. The range, on the other hand, of the brief realistic tales of gross humour, such as the French fabliaux, is too narrow, the ideas

are too conventional, to suggest the free imaginative working upon life of the novelist's mind.

For the existence of the novel certain conditions, material and moral, had to be fulfilled, and they never were fulfilled until modern times. The novel depends for its support upon a large public; it could never have been brought into being at the command of an individual patron, or to gratify the interest of a narrowly limited circle of readers. Now, for the existence of a large body of readers, the habit of reading must be widespread in the community, and books must be cheaply reproduced. An illiterate public may listen to poetry or to brief prose tales, or may enjoy dramatic performances, but it cannot be reached by novels. This prime condition was attained only for a relatively short time before the modern era. Books were comparatively cheap and reading in either Greek or Latin was common throughout the Roman Empire; but no such vast body of readers could have existed as has been made possible by printing, and by the spread of elementary education in modern times. But more important are what may be called the moral conditions. There

must be not only a tolerably large public able to read novels and a cheap supply of books; but the public must be interested in novels and hence ready to buy them and support the novelist. To this end the public must be capable of feeling an interest in the fictitious picture of life on this earth. They will not do this if they are engrossed with the thoughts of another world. Puritans and monks are not interested in novels. The influence of religious prejudices against novels has been felt, though less and less strongly, throughout the English speaking world, and is felt even now in remote corners of America among certain extreme religious sects. Just as the theatre—and indeed all imaginative literature—has been looked at with eyes of doubt by moralists of the most ancient times,—by Plato and Plutarch, by the Presbyterian Prynne, the High Churchman Collier, the Methodist Wesley, so the novel has been from its creation under the ban of religious condemnation. It is a mundane form of literature and appeals to a mundane spirit.

Again it cannot be the case that the very poor and wretched shall be interested in the imaginative picture of daily life. For them, the value of letters will be to provide an escape

from common life, from its pain and constraint and tedium, to a more beautiful or a more amusing world. The Italian peasant when he reads at all, reads from little rough books in clumsy type the tales of Charlemagne and his paladins. Kings and princes, again, when they are not as nowadays under the constraint of middle-class fashions, demand a literature of flattery and show—the masques of Ben Jonson, the monarchist plays of Corneille, the epic celebrating their ancestors. The novel appeals to those who are set neither too high nor too low, who have leisure to enjoy, but who have also a daily business, who have duties and active relations in the give-and-take of men of ordinary affairs.

Average life cannot be interesting unless it is various; and this cannot be unless the average man has the choice of a variety of careers. A fixed type of society, constraining each of its members within a narrow field of experience, cannot offer to the imagination sufficiently free play in the creation of character, is not rich enough, to be interesting. The types of chivalry, of mediaeval religious aspirations, were too few, and the choice between them was not open at all, or was made

too early in life for a drama of character to arise with reference to them. The same thing is true even of the New Comedy of Athens, so far as we can judge of it; its range of incident was narrow and conventional. A customary society, one in which occupation and hence in which the general prepossessions of men's minds are determined by status—by birth—is less interesting and dramatic than one in which choice enters, in which to some degree the proverbial phrase holds good: *"la carrière ouverte aux talents."* Modern industrial society, in which there is a myriad of occupations, each defining a spirit, an approach to life, creating a type, and yet retaining a common equality and a human self-respect, so that there may be sufficient intelligent interminglings among the members of socio-economic groups for one group to react on another freely, is more picturesque, more full of stimulating contrast, than Homer's world, or Menander's, or than even that diversified nine-and-twenty in a company which set out from Canterbury in fair mid-April. "Doctor, lawyer, merchant," commercial traveller, engineer of a hundred varieties; minister of more than a hundred; citizen of Singapore, Reykjavik, Cuzco, London; globe-

trotter; dweller on a back street, or an avenue, or in the mountains; East or West, the novel freely accepts all types, nay, rejoices in them, and rejoices also in the individual differences of men as well as in their typical character, and their fundamental humanity. A relatively free and various social order is essential to the existence of the novel, and the fixity of social standing, the establishment of castes, any feudalisms, open or veiled, such as underlay all antiquity and the whole of the Middle Ages, does not allow free course for imaginative sympathy, humorous or tragic, within the bounds of normal reality.

Meredith in his *Essay on Comedy* insists on freedom in the relations of the sexes, a condition of society in which the freedom of choice on both sides and frank companionship are possible, as essential to the rationally humorous criticism of life which is the living spirit of his fiction. On the other hand, it is the thwarted or oppressed individuality of women more than the unhappy fate of men which generates the tragic novel of Richardson, of George Eliot, and of Thomas Hardy; and in a society in which the domestic comedy and the domestic tragedy of the ordinary life of women

was not various and interesting a novel, if it existed, would be very different from the novel as we know it. But poetry has never been without heroines; and it may be a question whether the women of literature are on the whole not even more varied, rich, and complex in character than the men. The two sexes have stood side by side in interesting companionship or conflict since the beginning of days: even in the Iliad the most interesting characters, because the most complicated, are women or goddesses. The equality of the sexes in psychological variousness and moral dignity has always been practically recognized by the poets; it is only theorists who have denied it. Pope is guilty of the silly affirmation that most women have no character, but he was only trying to be smart. Never has a great imaginative genius created or human history exhibited interesting manhood without interesting womanhood. The creator of Siegfried made Brunhilde, of Achilles Helen, of Œdipus Antigone, of Beowulf Thrytho, of the Knight the Wife of Bath and Cressida. Where there was Pericles there was Aspasia, where Alfred the Lady of Mercia, where Nicephorus Theophano, where Gunnar Ragnhild. We may

therefore be sure that if the order of things encourages the sense of the individuality of men, makes the ordinary life of ordinary men an object of imaginative interest, the sense of individuality in women will likewise be encouraged, and the ordinary life of ordinary women will not fail to excite imaginative contemplation. In the largest view, then, the "feminist" movement, however obvious it is in modern fiction, is but one aspect of a larger economic and social movement, is not a primary cause for the existence of the novel, but is a fact affecting it.

The novel, then, came late because it is the expression of conditions and of ideas which had no existence until modern times. It is the most free, the most flexible, the most various form of literature; it offers the highest possibility for the exhibition of character independent of circumstance, and thus it exalts the worth of the individual human soul. It offers the freest play for the humorous observation of the eccentricities of life and the panorama of society. Thus it may offer the most tonic and bracing of social philosophies. It gives the opportunity of a minutely accurate psychological truth; it may be the most scientific

of imaginative writing. More than any verse, it may feel social wrong and grief: and so more profoundly than any poet the novelist has revealed

> "Sorrow barricadoed evermore
> Within the walls of cities."

So far is the novel from being an exhausted or a decadent type, that considering the social conditions which have created it, and the prospect as to social conditions in the future, we may be sure that whether the present order of society is stable or is destined to lead on to new forms, novels are sure to be written, that there will be a place for the social prose epic on an ample scale, humorous, tragic, pathetic, or philosophic.

CHAPTER II

THE SOURCES OF INTEREST

A good novel,—a novel which does more than spread sails to catch the passing breeze of popular interest,—has at least two vital qualities. These are its imagination and its union of individual difference with general probability. In an unreflective way, people think of the imagination merely as the power of extraordinary invention. But the height of imagination is not manifested by the power to move naturally in a fantastic world, whether with Beckford or Mrs. Radcliffe or Maeterlinck or Poe,—a world of one-eyed calendars and djinns, or vague alarming presences and midnight groans, or faint wraiths in blue air. Still less is imagination limited to the power of creating an ingenious and exciting improbability, the faculty of Cutcliffe-Hyne or Dumas or Dr. Cyrus Townsend Brady, in which insoluble mysteries are solved by imperturbable superhuman detec-

tives, or insuperable obstacles are overcome by loyal gentlemen of great simplicity, or heroines of rubbery elasticity escape six times a week from inevitable disaster. By imagination I mean the image-making power,—the power of illusion without hallucination,—the power of consciously seeing with the mind's eye, hearing with the mental ear, weighing, feeling, apprehending by every sense beings never perceived except by the mind, as if they were objectively perceived or remembered.

Take two men considering a physical problem,—two contractors looking over the plans of a house, or two civil engineers considering a preliminary location. One "catches the idea," apprehends the contour of the ground as a whole, can follow the road and go in and out of the rooms. The other sees nothing but specifications and estimates, and reckons the entire problem as an analytic piece of reasoning, with no vision except of the figures at the point of his pencil. The first has imagination, and the more vigorous his imagination the more nearly his preliminary solution of the problem approaches to reality. Imagination is not the power of creating that which is unlike normal experience; on the contrary, it is

the power of creating that which is like normal life under the law of being of the thing imagined. As the imaginative mechanic sees that which may be made actual before it exists, the imaginative novelist perceives that which might be made actual if one could build a life. Mrs. Sarah Fraser Tytler one day happened to be going upstairs in a French apartment-house. Through an open door she caught sight for an instant of a French Protestant family at their evening meal; and her imagination set at work by the impressions of the moment created a narrative with its setting in the small circle of French Protestantism,—a narrative the incontestable veracity of which has been the subject of wondering praise. Hers was the novelist's imagination. It seems to me, on the other hand, though I say it with diffidence, that the poet Gray and the novelist Black manifested a lack of imagination when they strove to fix the precise epithet for what they saw "on the spot," in the actual disturbing presence of the veritable fact, not made over by the force of their own nature. Novels, even novels of a certain merit, may be made by the clever compiling of observations, instead of creatively, from an inner energy. The novels

of Lord Beaconsfield are made in this way. His characters are actual acquaintances whom he has met, or personages about whom he read and of whom he heard anecdotes. He repeats their ideas, reports their accents, notes and records their eye-glasses, their poses, their ways of dressing their hair, but never understands them, never enters their hearts and makes them act in a new situation, as they would have done but never did. The earlier work of Alphonse Daudet, in *The Nabob,* and parts of Norris's *The Pit,* impress me as built up in part though not wholly in the same way, as not sufficiently created anew in the author's own mind.

Imagination is above all manifested by its power to harmonize discordances. A high imagination subdues the most various and most incongruous materials to a single though complicated order. This harmony or order comes from the author's mind. His nature is one; what passes through his mind is shaped, coloured, brought into unity. The diversity of his experience and observation is inevitably in some sort harmonized by the working of his nature. Thus in Shakespeare's tragedies, the humorous parts are in contrast with the seri-

ous parts, but are, at the same time, congruous with them. The hysterical tenderness of the humour in *Lear* is congruous with Lear's tragedy of the affections; the grotesqueness and verbal ingenuity of the humour in *Hamlet* are congruous with the prince's irony and dialectic play of mind. And in the harmony of these apparent discords the power of Shakespeare's imagination is manifested. So the keen worldliness and the genial simplicity of *Tom Jones,* Elfride's courage on the headland and her timidity about her early love-affair in *A Pair of Blue Eyes,* the ferocity and good nature of *Taras Bulba* are harmonious. On the other hand, the death of Maggie and Tom in *The Mill on the Floss,* and the marriage of Adam Bede and Dinah Morris are out of tone. The death, though possible, indeed not even extraordinary, is in reality only a way of escape for the novelist from answering the inevitable questions about Maggie's adjustment to life raised by the narrative. The marriage is designed to inculcate a doctrine of making the best of the second-best dear to the author but not grounded in the novel. These endings follow upon nothing in the stories which precede them. They are not imagined

but willed; and though they cannot be said to violate logic, they are alien to the temper of the books in which they appear.

Or again the disharmony may be a lack of evenness in the "texture" of the novel: a relative thinness and inadequacy of detail in parts. Trollope's John Bold is not substantial enough to sustain his position in the beautiful story of *The Warden.* Is it too much to say that Fielding's Blifil is inadequate to the part he plays in *Tom Jones* because he is too lightly and mechanically outlined to be Tom's rival? In spite of myself I am impressed in the same way by most of the secondary characters in *Diana of the Crossways;* they are not vigorous enough to hold their own with Diana. They are natural, but they lack colour and solidity.

It is the accuracy and significance of the details by which the definiteness of the imaginative power is shown. The imaginative writer sees his group of people in space and hears their voices. He understands their philosophy and notices their buttons. He finds their characters exhibited in casual deeds and trivial words. When Dmitri Karamazov, under the charge of having murdered his father, is stripped by the police officers of his bloody

clothes and wrapped in a quilt, he is not at the moment so much concerned with the charge against him as ashamed to have his feet seen, "especially the coarse, flat, crooked nail on his right great toe." And when he is compelled to dress in another man's clothes, he loses his temper, and feels disgraced.

Such things are dropped from the pen casually, as it would seem, but they *tell*. The conversations of the imagined characters do not sound like the only ones they ever had, and the things they do in the novel are not the only ones they ever did. There is a great deal more out of sight which the imaginative writer might have told, but had no room for. It is of course in the congruity of character with itself that the imaginative power of creating harmony is most plainly manifested. The character created for the plot, by the will, is almost obliged to contradict itself. It is often at bottom a contradiction. Such, for example, as Sir Leslie Stephen suggested, are Defoe's criminals. They are fully and adequately studied by Defoe, who knew jail-birds by personal acquaintance and pirates by diligent study of geography and criminal records, but they are not created anew by any imaginative sympathy;

and hence they are mere merchants engaged in crime, pursuing the business of murder and brigandage on the high seas with a petty accountant's calculations of profit and loss; sending their ill-gotten gains home to their sisters, retiring in middle-age to respectability, and ending their days as churchwardens in their native villages. These beings are not imagined; they are all Defoe in the pirate business; but Defoe could not have been in the pirate business, not because his conscience would not let him, but because his nature and education had not qualified him to take in what it meant to be a pirate. These characters are impossible from the first, had never imaginative life. Such, as Henry James says, are Dickens's characters made to tell a story round or to move a story along: Cheeryble Brothers, Oliver Twists, beings whose natures radically contradict the conditions under which they live, or by which they are supposed to have been formed.

Sometimes characters suffer violence from the will of the author by sudden contradictions of their nature introduced to satisfy the plot. A hard man of business who has as a young man resigned from the United States Navy,

and expatriated himself because he cannot really regard his country as a nation is suddenly touched by his daughter's devotion to the flag, renounces the English peerage he has attained, and goes "home" to America to serve his true country in its exigency. In *Ursule Mirouet* a hard-hearted old skeptical doctor is converted by the lily-like, hothouse piety of his niece; in *Eugénie Grandet* Eugénie violates her own sweet and virginal nature to make a dramatic point in a letter. In these instances the lack of unity of character is due to a lack of continuous imaginative realization of it, to an uncertain grip of the author's mind upon his subject.

The imaginative writer surprises us, or it may be shocks us by what he has discovered that his characters did; but we cannot doubt his veracity. He is not satisfied even by a sound logic as to the consistency of his characters. He knows them, and hence he is ready to be startled by them. Henry Esmond burning his mother's marriage-certificate, Henchard tying up one arm before he fights Farfrae, Roy Richmond leaping from his pose as a statue to embrace his son, these and a hundred more incidents great or little are the work of

the imagination, reconciling the strange and the natural in harmonious unity.

The imagination creates works which are not only harmonious in tone and consistent in inner relations, but so proportioned and emphasized as to produce the effect of unity. Unimaginative invention tends to a staccato overemphasis of parts and thus to "spottiness" in the total effect. The novel of observation is likely to be a set of exaggerated anecdotes, like Smollett's *Roderick Random.* Dickens manifests the same tendency after he begins to exhaust the force of his first great excitement, and writes with acquired skill but not with natural delight. In *Our Mutual Friend* there is no centre; Boffin and Wegg and Bella and the rest make up a group of unreconciled eccentricities, mechanically assembled about the one ingeniously contrived but wholly mechanical mystery with which they have no inward and natural relation. Each stumps or languishes or grins his part, but in each picture in which the characters are grouped, and in the entire novel there is no relief to the perpetually underlined or over-ingenious farce. How different is even *David Copperfield,* which though not one in any mechanical way, is harmonious

in the tone of its half-dozen stories, and in each one of them brings all the events and the most incongruous characters into unforced relationship, failing in places as where Micawber's rehabilitation in Australia is devised, not imagined, yet constituting a whole, not perpetually and harshly crying out for attention to each extraordinary incident.

In the perfect work never to be made by man the imaginative force has been so great, and the obedience to it so complete that the realization of the fictitious world within the author's mind is absolute;—complete and harmonious as a whole and vivid and definite in all its parts; having the variety, the energy, the unity, the movement of a living organism. This is what Henry James means by *saturation:* the author is saturated with his idea when it has absolutely fulfilled itself to its uttermost consequence, not of detached arithmetical logic, but of imagined vital inevitability, within his mind. His characters are live beings, not facts analysed under a law of necessity, are complete, with hopes, and faces, and hands, and hatbands; and their world is complete, with its sounds and colour; its manners, inhibitions, preconceptions, and *mores;* and their

actions are complete to their end; and the whole story undulates, darkens, lightens, progresses, like reality. The greatest men approach to this completeness, Balzac or Tolstoy dominates us, makes his dream for a time our reality. But even these men are not absolute nature, and even they cannot always give us the strength of unbroken flawless reality. Somewhere there *is* always an inadequacy, a little corner of the mind not "saturated." The vision is intermittent, as when Scott's Helen Macgregor or Dickens's Rosa Dartle declaims, as when Balzac's ladies utter vulgarisms, or Tom Jones takes Lady Bellaston's money. The vision is shaken and changes; the mind cannot hold it persistently the same. It vanishes or becomes indistinct, returns, varies, and must be recovered. Although the imaginative vision is not created by the will or put in order by the analytic reason, it is yet not something with reference to which the novelist is entirely a passive recipient. The attention may be held upon it; by meditation it develops and becomes clearer, it disengages itself from confusion and sloughs off contradictions, it realizes itself. The apologue of the Dream-Butter which appeared years ago in the San

Francisco *Lark* (of short but lofty flight) is in point.

There exists a substance which is the substratum or original of all material objects, and which is capable of being formed by the concentration of the mind upon it into any physical thing imagined. A man (say a real estate agent) buys some from a pedlar. He exercises his mind upon it. He hesitates for a while before deciding what he shall imagine, but decides upon a pocket-knife; visions it, raises the lid of the box over the dream-butter, and finds a jelly-like indistinct thing of a long elliptical shape like the sinker on a fish line. He thinks again and again; more and more intently, more and more sharply, and finally he makes a somewhat rough but quite usable pocket-knife. With practice he acquires facility. At last he tries a house, and succeeds in creating a real house—solid and practicable, but somehow too big, too showy and uncomfortable. He trades it for the little house of his neighbour, a poet, who strips off the superfluous ornament, and with a sparing and thoughtful use of the dream-butter finishes the house consistently and is at home in it. The little fable may be used to inculcate a number

of doctrines, but for the moment the important one is that even to make a very plain pocket-knife out of dream-butter requires energetic and long-continued concentration and direction of the attention, perhaps readjustment of the conception and its details; that the creative imagination in its highest form is not generally at work improvising, but begins by improvisation and proceeds by meditative revision to a deeper and deeper insight and a more and more perfect revelation of itself. The result when realized consumes the process; there is no sign of weariness or work in the finished thing. It is like a living being: organic, without marks of tooling or juncture; complete, having an independent existence; at one with itself, satisfying its law of being.

The primary imaginative energy is the soul of the work, and the meditative and conscious deliberation determines the completeness with which the work carries out the law of its being. Some novels are more excellent because of the force, originality, and vividness of the imagination displayed in them, others because the perfection with which they realize their ideal. Thus Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* creates a great many vivid figures and tells a

striking story, but it begins with exasperating slowness, ends with ruthless haste and improbability, introduces weakening and incongruous boudoir conversations and stilted people. Miss Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* on the other hand, is as nearly a perfect work as human nature can create. It has what most critics call "the finest beginning in the world," ends by gratifying the raised expectation, yet not trivially, has a distinct and interesting double plot, beautifully homogeneous throughout. The one important adverse comment to be made upon its technique is the stagnation of the plot for several chapters in the middle. Yet *Pride and Prejudice* is not so great a work as *Guy Mannering* because it does not create a world so genial, so interesting, with such vivid contrasts of character, with such strangeness made credible.

Again the parable declares that there is a difference in the value of the thing imagined in itself, that the utmost satisfactory creation of one mind was a rough knife, and that it takes a poet to be at home in the spacious palaces of the imagination. No matter how vividly conceived and definitely realized, Trollope's vision of English cathedral towns was poorer than

Turgenev's of the Russian villages. The difference is not a matter of the subject as an outer fact, but of the subject as an inner fact; each man sees with a genial largeness, or profundity, or energy, or sweetness, or melancholy, or flatness, a vision which is his alone.

A novel to claim attention must have something to separate it, to make it unique. The most vivid interest of every man is in his own affairs. He sees his own world in natural light: the grass-blade edged with flame, the shadowed tree-trunk rich with purplish colour even at the approach of dusk. The world of art is a painted world, a world in which the flame of life is but imitated; its brightest light is grey, its darkest shadow is grey, its richest colour is grey. The imaginative world must put in its demand upon the attention in competition with the affair of each of us, with our own business: must in a different sense from Henry James's "compete with life." To compete it must be unlike life, must have a newness and energy such as to overcome the greater brightness and intensity of our own experience. At the same time it must be familiar, capable of being assimilated to our own natures. The imaginative creation, accordingly, must be at

once exceptional and natural,—strange but probable,—and the novel, to realize its special quality, its reason for separateness, must be strange within the probability of an ostensibly normal world. The union, then, of a strangeness with a closeness to nature which produces the effect of being very nature itself is the problem of the novel.

The assumed normality of surroundings assumes a real and veritable order of society, actual conditions realized and realizable. It must be wonderful not so much in its working out, which is constrained within the limits of practical normality, but in its primary problem. The game which it plays is under uncommonly severe rules. Like every other form of imaginative fiction it assumes at least one impossible premise: that one participant could have detached himself sufficiently to see all sides of a narrative, and to select the essential facts; or that a body of letters could have been written so free from omissions and from redundancies as to tell a systematic story and to develop all the characters in it; or that there was an "omniscient spectator" who knew all the acts and could reveal the inner life of all the characters. But the premise being granted,

the novel makes few and slight assumptions: does not call upon us to believe in a council of devils in a fine palace built with higher technical skill than the best *Beaux-Arts* work, or to suppose that life can be symmetrized with thirty-six dramatic situations, or that human beings will speak blank verse. The rules of this game in strictness, then, allow no more "marvel," no more divergence from the normally possible, than just enough to get started on, just enough to make a story. But so strict a game is seldom played; a few more admissions are required from the reader. Authors feel the need of being a little more wonderful than life, or at least than normal and ordinary life, in order to compete with it; and as the coming into existence of the novel represents a step toward limiting the author's freedom of disport in the world of strangeness and deception, so the history of the novel has manifested a constant development, a progress from a greater freedom of conventions to a stricter and stricter method.

In the first place, the novel, as has been intimated, tends to be even more strict than other types of imaginative writing in requiring the marvellous to be premised as a preliminary

matter,—as a settling of conditions, constituting a problem. This is true everywhere, in a way, of course; even the marvel of the Arabian Nights or a fairy tale allots to certain agents,—godmothers, or rocs,—definite functions, and insists on a certain consonance of character in the personages of the tale. There is a kind of probability even in this marvel. Still more serious works like *The Divine Comedy*, or *The Faerie Queene* follow out fixed and statable laws, are not in capricious worlds, though they are not in normal ones. Admitting the plan of salvation, and the literal precision of biblical references to the fall of man and to angels, and the soundness of Dionysius the Areopagite's theology, and the accuracy of the church fathers' view that the heathen deities were real and were devils, *Paradise Lost* strives to solve its (impossible) problem with consistent rationality; and it does wonderfully well what cannot be done. These works admit their marvel as a *datum* and solve it in terms of orderly remarkableness. So in the novel, its elements of marvel enter as the data of a problem set at the beginning, and the solution is as strictly probable as the art and imagination of the writer can make it. Moreover, the

very introduction of the marvel itself must be disguised; it must be insinuated, led into, so as to avoid shocking modern scepticism and incredulity.

Defoe, for example, gains for his very commonplace hero Robinson Crusoe the distinction of strangeness by the accident of casting him away after many adventures upon a desert island. The loneliness, the danger, the tropic growths of the island are sufficient by their strangeness to support the detailed homeliness of the incident and the lack of distinction in the character. On the desert island Robinson Crusoe's pitiful clumsy pots are pathetically exciting and the footstep in the sand is an object of tragic dread. At home in Hull his dishes would be like anybody else's; and who would care about one among millions of footprints on a London pavement on a wet day? But the story has lost ground as years have gone by, because we are better acquainted than Defoe's contemporaries with the real character of primitive life. Even children nowadays know that there was a Stone Age, and that Robinson Crusoe compared with a savage was rich with the stores which he carried from the wreck. He had the strength of

civilization. As a seven-year-old friend said to me, on coming back from an Indian camp, Robinson had everything; he had iron tools. Persons a little older refuse to admit that it was psychologically possible for a man to live alone so many years without becoming lower than a savage,—"losing the power of speech and having to make a fire by rubbing sticks together." In other words, the domain of rational probability has extended to the criticism of even the uninhabited island. In the *Journal of the Plague Year,* again, Defoe creates the strangeness of the surroundings by an excessive abnormality of setting, by putting his hero alone in the midst of conditions which detach him from ordinary experience,—alone, in a plague-stricken city. And the marvel is still external to the character as before; it affords the opportunity to record material details with precision which gain their power because the circumstances are strange. The person is as commonplace as Robinson Crusoe, and as completely unchanged by his experience. For the rest of his writings Defoe adopted a means of effect never given up since his day—the recording with steady precision and great com-

pleteness the details of the life of criminals, of anti-social beings,—and thus gains strangeness with external likeness to actuality; but at the expense in his case of inner congruity. His violent means of attaining strangeness which shall give interest to the most ordinary of events and persons were of course destined to be soon exhausted. Subtler is the device of the historical novel. Write about a forgotten age; introduce it somewhat prosaically and with a certain slowness of detail, and then make it more full of brilliant adventure than normal life, while at the same time you abundantly document and fully drape and costume and elaborately present custom and social conditions. Thus the amplitude of your detail will gain credence for your romantic adventures, and your romantic tone will contribute interest to your apparently commonplace detail. It is thus that Scott and his followers—progressively abandoning the historical pretence and becoming more frankly adventurous—write romance under the name of the historical novel. Or place your story in a little known far country, with an association of strangeness, in the *Banda Oriental,* the land "of the ostrich, the flamingo, and the black-necked swan,"

where the grace and dignity of generous personal courtesy shine out against public corruption, and crime; or in the Near East,

"where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime,"

or in the Far East,

"Where there ain't no Ten Commandments."

and strangeness of adventure will be not only tolerated but demanded. You may even make up your country, as a Zenda or a Ruritania. The strange things that have really occurred in Servia or Albania will warrant something extraordinary in an entirely new, a non-existent, mountain principality; and you may create a romance of its own special colouring, bringing into modern times the adventurous personal strenuousness which the novelist of mediaeval history claimed at first for his own. But in this strange setting, character must be simple and not strange. Considering the marvellous incidents of *The Three Musketeers* it is impossible for the characters to be complex, or to fluctuate and develop. They must be fixed, simple, and boldly outlined, so that they can be *counted on* in any thrilling crisis. In such

stories the attention may be given to what is done, and very little to what the people are as individuals. Thus in Kipling's narratives of distant India the bazaar, the villages, the dogs of the jungle must be such as the external observer would see—keen of eye as he might be, it would not be the undercurrents of the soul or the uncommon incidents that he could present. The characters too, the native servant, the soldier, the wandering lama, are typical figures, broadly representing great classes, externally seen. A native Indian writing for natives would take nearly all that is true in Kipling for granted, as commonplace; he would feel little interest in Indian types, but would create the exceptional, the distinguished Indian character.

Now all these ways of approach are mainly ways of giving to plots of adventure a plausibility which they would not have without them, ways of avoiding the crudity of the *Monk,* or *Frankenstein,* or *Melmoth* while retaining their strangeness. Likewise the marvel of mystery and the marvel of terror, are united with an external normality, and made tolerable by every means of ingenuity. If the mystery is an unsolved strangeness, it is built up by an ac-

cumulating of separately possible coincidences, which taken altogether hint—do not assure—the apparent activity of supernormal powers. There "may be something in it"; enough to create an uncertain shiver; no crude definiteness. So long as it is mysterious it is infinite. Each of many things might be the result of some normal cause; but the reader feels that all could not be so. Or if the supernormal intrudes—as it sometimes quite boldly does—into the realm of the novel, it is made credible by the delicacy, the almost infinite completeness and adequacy of its detailed realism. The *Peau de Chagrin* is bought at an ordinary curiosity shop; you see the confusion of the shop as if you were in it; and the incidents that follow are as natural and about as complete as life. The object itself has the utmost commonness of appearance.

Now all these means of exciting interest by contributing strangeness are in a way external; that is, they depend upon the event, or the external surroundings in themselves. They involve a departure from the normal law of life; and they are hence out of tune with the tendency to believe in the "Reign of Law"; they contradict science, and what is worse they wear

out; there was little more to be done with such formulas. The lonely human being on an uninhabited island or in a great disaster, the romantic adventurer who lived "sixty years since," the ghost and the inquisitor and the corsair and the black cat and the ape who walked like a man are used up.

The rules of the game admitting an order of existence more beautifully coloured or more adventurous than the normal make the game too easy for the pitcher. So a new and severe method is to be followed—or an old one more rigidly. Let us substitute for the marvel of romance a more internal marvel. Let us explore experience for eccentricity and for fresh variety and colour. The realist presented the detail of normal experience with the richest fulness and exact credibility; even too fully at times because the accumulation of detail without salience became monotonous, and he discovered and more fully revealed the marvel not generally of normal character, but more often of abnormal, or at least of not entirely normal character within the normal world. Not George Eliot or Balzac or Tolstoy or Zola or Henry James or Flaubert or Dostoevsky or Polenz presents ordinary people doing ordinary things

under ordinary conditions. Almost in spite of themselves, as it seems, they combine strangeness with commonness—a strangeness in the characters of their novels with commonness in their appearance and surroundings.

A superior moral force characterizes the personages of some. In Balzac, human beings scheme, hold fast to revenge, contend, but with a bitterness, with an intellectual tenacity and energy far above the capacity of average humanity, and are divided into knaves (or self-seekers) and fools, with a precision far from normal. George Eliot's leading persons, especially her women, are steadfast, far-sighted, noble, deliberate, intellectually gifted, above the normal. The interest of *Adam Bede,* of *The Mill on the Floss,* of *Middlemarch,* would be nothing if the heroes and heroines were not supernormally good. And human beings as a whole are abnormally rational in her books. The novels of Tolstoy again deal with superior persons, superior in energy or talent, or elevated above the common in power and station, who all belong to the "aristocracy of passionate souls." Before the eyes of Zola the evil of the world rises in tremendous smoky visions, almost apocalyptic, and with vast architectural

forms, resembling beings in a Greek tragedy in portentous hugeness if not in harmony of proportions. Dostoevsky deals with mental invalids, with the inmates of a psychiatric institution, with epileptics, erotomaniacs, religious enthusiasts, the unbalanced, those near the line, those who go over the line. Henry James presents his characters not in normal relations to their natural surroundings, but in transplantation, the American type in strange relation to a transatlantic society; and he endows his persons with a certain unemphatic dignity and in them unites moral insight and even shrewdness with an odd naïveté,—producing a combination which is strange, even piquant.

The increase of this inner strangeness has then been accompanied by a diminution of external strangeness in action and fable. In a novel of Henry James's, for instance, our interest is in the personages—where each of them is unique, unfixed, not quite predictable, the thing done is obviously trifling, it is a symbol of the minds of the characters. A rising up or a sitting down, the lifting of a finger, even a mere look may express a moral crisis of the greatest intensity; and the less extraordinary the act as a phenomenon in the outward

world, the greater the concentration of the author's and of the reader's mind upon the moral process going on within the characters of the novel.

In general, the "advanced" realists, the "naturalists" obtain the strangeness which gives distinction to their commonness from the study of the eccentricities, and especially the maladies of the soul produced (and normally produced) in some natures by the conditions of modern life, but not its normal product in most natures. Or else they explore special localities, the backwaters of society, or exotic regions, for the note of uncommonness, which the instinct of humanity demands from its fiction.

If we strive to find authors who on the whole refuse even this means of sugaring or spicing normality, they will be few indeed. Even Jane Austen and Thackeray and Trollope permit themselves the luxury of a certain inhuman grotesqueness, a certain too goodness to be true, in their fools;—in Mr. Collins and Captain Costigan, even in Mrs. Proudie.

Daudet in *Numa,* de Maupassant in *The Baptism* do not even go so far. In Mr. Arnold Bennett, though there is something of a difference in the hard naturalism of the *Five*

Towns, this difference is not after all the note, the feature, of his best work. These speculations might lead us to seek for the source of interest with such novelists in a certain depth, in a power to reveal above others the strangeness of common things, in a revelation like that which Wordsworth prefigured in the *Lyrical Ballads*—an illumination of the common things of life with a colour drawn from the imagination—a colour, as he intended, real though not external,—perceived, not attached by the will—and realistic, though not hard and external like Crabbe's or Flaubert's realism. Such a novel, a novel of human pity, absurdity, greatness, and lovableness, littleness, and nastiness all at once, or in normal proportion seems not yet to exist. For we do not get it from these writers, admirable as they are. The lack of strangeness with them is in so far a defect that they are in reality less interesting for the lack of it, and in no degree profounder than Tolstoy or Balzac, who diverge more than they from the normal, whose perception of strange personalities reveals the depths of nature more adequately than does their temperance. "Passion," says Balzac,—and Zola quotes him with approval,—"is the source of interest: but

passion is an excess; it is an evil." Moreover, passion is a part of normal life, but nothing but passion, a logical, complete, overwhelming passion, always and everywhere,—every one a hundredth man,—this is abnormal.

Strangeness with probability then, a certain departure from the normal under normal conditions, remains as an element essential to the most commanding interest in the novel. This strangeness may be in the externals, the outworks, of setting or events, but has historically tended to be manifested more and more in the characters.

And speaking broadly, the exceptional in one aspect is ordinarily combined with the normal in other aspects. A far-off country or a distant age is made not merely credible but familiar. The men and things of today are seen under a strange light and in an alien air. If the setting is strange or the plot marvellous, the characters are simplified and typical; if the setting is familiar the characters are exceptional. It is not altogether and always true that character creates plot; still less that setting creates character. The fluctuation and movement necessary to create interest in one cannot easily be given to all. One or the other is the dominant

element of the tale. But the higher achievement of the novelist is to unite strangeness and normality; to make plots, setting, and characters interesting in themselves in that they excite wonder and at the same time gratify reason; that they astonish with their strangeness and at the same instant command sympathy and intelligence by their human truth. This union, this harmonizing of the apparently contradictory, like every harmony or reconciliation of opposites is the triumph of the aroused imagination. It is the achievement of Balzac, whose creative audacity overwhelms the reader, and for a time makes Balzac's fantastic Paris seem the only real place on earth. It is the achievement of Tolstoy, who carries us with him into the consciousness of a man suffering the very pangs of dissolution or compels us to be present at the inconceivable tumult of battle, or of Dickens, obliging us to believe in the topsy-turvy impossibilities of Sam Weller and the Pickwick Club. The vital force of the novel is in the imaginative energy, which on the one hand grasps and realizes even the marvellous, sometimes even the impossible, and on the other hand subdues to itself the abundant detail of common life, and unites the

two so completely that one gives support, body, the command of human sympathy, the other life, energy, soul, the command of emotional elevation, united in a single indivisible union, an incarnation.

CHAPTER III

THE FABLE

Every story, of course, has three necessary elements: something done, by somebody, under some conditions. The thing done, the transaction, is the fable; or when definitely organized, the plot. The persons doing are characters; the conditions under which the thing is done constitute the setting. Each element may be the main object of the author's interest, dominating, or even opposing or suppressing the other two. So there is a healthy joy in adventure; Charles Reade and Charles Kingsley delight in deeds; and however vivid the characters they are mainly actors, and however full the setting, it is only the scenery of the stage on which an action goes on. Others rejoice in the quaint, or curious, or distinguished human specimen; so much if no more there is in common with Dickens and Henry James and Meredith. When their people act, they act to manifest themselves, to exhibit their oddity or

special difference; and the setting is important because it is the soil or medium in which peculiar types of human nature flourish. Still other writers care for the spirit of a peculiar setting; they make of their characters instruments which contribute their part, their special "tone colour" to the author's orchestra, and their plots are the things which express the spirit of a time and place. So it is with Pater; *Marius the Epicurean* is the expression of a temper, of the spirit and quality of an age. Mr. Maurice Hewlett or Mr. Thomas Hardy in their books express the sentiment pervading their vision of Tuscany or Wessex, like the light of spring or winter falling upon a landscape.

There are other impulses to writing than the ideas of action, character, and setting; there are other elements constituting a work of fiction than these three, but these three alone are the things that must be present before the vision of the novelist in order to create the substance of a story. Apparently the most fundamental, certainly the most obvious of these three elements, is the fable or plot,—the thing done. Whenever anything is done there is in some sense a story. It may be a mere

physical fact—rolling over a stone with a crowbar. Even so simple an act begins, continues, and ends. A mountain range may have a story, recounting the work of the forces slowly squeezing and crumpling the solid substance of the earth's crust, folding the rocks like softened glass, in time producing convulsions and distortions, until the great mass is lifted to its height, and rests in comparative quiet, while it is gradually worn by the winds and waters again to a level. So a planet has a story, whether it first broke off a wheeling, fiery, gaseous mass from a central orb, and is one day to come to rest forever whirling cold and inert; or whether it was formed by the beating together of a multitude of cold stones, and heated by their mutual pressure to incandescence. And the universe has a story, parts of which every science is trying to tell. In other words the working of every force or group of forces through a period of time, from some recognizable beginning of their activity to some distant stopping place in their effects makes up a transaction. Now the existence of a force is only known, of course, as it works; and it works only in overcoming something. The measure of work is resistance. Where

there is a story there is a contest. Novels, being concerned with human beings and their fortunes, are concerned with the forces which human beings put forth, and which act upon them, and therefore are concerned with human contests. The prime interest of a novel may be in the contest of a man and an external material world, with "nature," as Robinson Crusoe wrestles with the hard conditions of the island. Or it may be in contests between man and man, for empire, or for a girl's hand in marriage, as in *The Master of Ballantrae* Mr. Henry and his brother are in perpetual rivalry. Or it may be between a man and "Society," as in Polenz's *Der Büttnerbauer* the new order of German life is the enemy of Büttner. Or it may be between a man and hidden powers of nature, as in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* where "The President of the Universe has his jest" with Tess. Or it may be between one part of a man's nature and another, as in *Middlemarch,* where the impulses of Dorothea's complex character are in almost unceasing conflict among themselves, and where all the more interesting personages are indeed "problematic natures." Often, perhaps commonly, the contest is double or triple and includes both an

outward and an inward struggle; weakness and treason within the soul conspire with foes without, while native strength and insight find beneficent forces in the outer world to aid them. Either side may be the active, the overcoming force; but contest, obvious or latent, there must be, or there can be no story.

In the contests which make up the transactions of novels, the world within,—the world of human nature,—and the world without,—the world of physical nature,—come into relation. Human beings are acted upon by events. Quentin Durward marries Isabella and is happy; Anna Karenina hurls herself beneath the wheels of the engine because of things which have happened. Again human beings change the outer world, as in *Tono-Bungay* the uncle's vision of the order of things with himself successful in it gets realized because of his imaginative power of realizing the dusty and vulgar facts of human gullibility. Or the personages themselves are made new by experience, like Tito Melema and Romola. In other words, the "forces" of consciousness,—the impulses, the imaginations, the will,—are forces in the world of outer fact, as the world without exercises a force upon the mind—the

world within. And in both worlds there are "laws," as we call them, recognized: some things both in the world without and the world within are inevitable; a law of necessity governs them. In others there are tendencies that can be discerned; they are under a law of "probability." Transactions and the working of forces in the moral and physical world, can be recognized as existing only under a fixed sequence, or a tendency; and hence the idea of a reasonable transaction has an analogy with the conceptions of physical science, which rest upon a belief in stable laws, or tendencies.

In the actual world of experience these laws are not found working with a clean and neat obviousness. The mountain range has its story, but it is not a distinct and single story. The mountain does not rise to its height and then decay, but rises and falls, grows and decays, both at once and confusedly. The crystal of nature is not perfect; the chemical salt of the rock is not pure. The world that we actually see and feel and hear and smell and know is an overwhelming confusion; we believe it orderly, we can find some orderly tendencies in it; to some extent we can give it order in a laboratory; and yet the law, the clean-cut

sequence, is a simplification of the facts, not an actually perceived thing. So no man's life is a neatly plotted story, but only fits and starts of a story. And as the man of science imposes upon the confusion of facts the pattern of his mind, makes them orderly by his geometry, his physics, and his zoology, so the teller of tales deals with human life, in part finding and in part creating a scheme or order of things with which human nature agrees, but which it does not realize.

The imaginative creator, then, carries out the thwarted and imperfectly realized tendencies to be perceived in actual life to their "logical" results; his world is simpler, more symmetrical, more connected, even more "probable" or "necessary" than the world of fact. The novelist is no exception; he too like the poet or the dramatist has in his own way to systematize life, to give it a pattern. The word *pattern* looks strange when applied to a process, to something going forward in time. The idea of patterning a form, a carpet, or a carved moulding awakens no surprise; but how pattern the story of a picnic, a murder, or a life? The object of making a pattern is to give an agreeable orderliness to things in confu-

sion, to bring a controlling unity into diversity. Its simplest means is repetition. Take a little curve; double it over, in other words repeat it symmetrically; you have the simplified outline, say, of a rose petal. Repeat the symmetrical form five times about a centre;—you have the outline of a rose in its lowest terms. Repeat the outline again and again over a surface—in rows right and left, up and down, and you have a simple design, a pattern—to cover a wall or a ceiling or a floor. Such a pattern might be not unpleasing, but its excessive simplicity is dull; something more than mere orderliness is requisite to create charm and interest. An orderliness that conquers, an orderliness that reduces refractory or difficult material to system; a unity that attains wealth of variety and surprises of discovery and delights of delicacy interests and excites more than regiments of lines and squares. So a pattern involving contrasts reduced to harmony; —a pleasant group of rounded contours with gradations of shadows and light, a series of carved festoons or the capitals of a row of pillars; or the sharper contrasts between the keen edges of light on a row of buttresses and the black shadows of arched win-

dows in a thick wall; or spaced marble statues in green shadows in a garden;—all such oppositions brought to order are more interesting than the dull flatness of a little pink rosette repeated over and over on a cream-coloured ground. A pleasant pattern is an orderly thing, but it is the more interesting the more decided the contrasts it can reduce to order. It is systematic; and at the same time it is more interesting as it conquers not only contrast but complexity. An ingenious pattern, rejoicing in a multitude of details, all brought to order: the border of an illuminated manuscript with an abundance of sharp leaves or a wavy tendrilled vine; a Japanese silk with dragons and strange birds and elaborate lotuses in ordered procession, are more interesting than a plain wall-paper or a dotted muslin. So good patterning is orderly; but it is orderly by controlling and admitting contrast and complextiy.

Now the decent patterning of repeated forms may be accomplished by any person of fair intelligence and good schooling who is not absolutely without a sense of formal beauty. But there is a higher ideal of design, a pattern which brings to unity more subtly related

material still. The best of the mechanically repeated patterns only gives moderate pleasantness to useful materials. But there is a nobler beauty of design which suggests the delicate curvature and subtle gradation of natural contours; such is the beauty of a fine painting or a noble group of sculpture. In these there is a balance not absolute but approximate, a balance of mass of light and dark, an underlying symmetry which gives to forms which are not mechanically symmetrical an order felt but not obtruded. Things succeeding each other in time may in their way receive an orderly scheme, a pattern; and like designs in outline and colour they may be patterned either with mechanical symmetry or with the higher beauty of an underlying, a suggested and immanent symmetry.

There is a mechanical pattern in the drumbeat, the march of soldiery, in all the routine which governs military life. The dance is patterned movement. Verse receives a pattern from repetition. The feet of verse repeat measured sequences of stressed and unstressed syllables; lines repeat the measured sequence of feet; stanzas repeat the regular groupings of the lines. Rhyme and assonance and al-

literation repeat sounds. But not alone in mechanism and outward form but in the evolution of ideas and the sequence of emotions poems are often built upon a framework of repetition, generally of repetition with progress. The ballad of *Edward* has a symmetrical pattern of rhythms, and a symmetry of recurrent words,—a symmetry also of action balanced and rhythmically repeating itself, but growing in dread and terror. In some boldly artificial types of prose, the same method is followed. The story of *The Three Bears* is simply and very artificially patterned, with its big bowl, and its middle-sized bowl and its little bowl; its rejecting of the big chair and the middle-sized chair and its breaking of the little chair; and so throughout it is as rhythmical in plot as a lyric poem in cadences. And something of this charm of patterned action, though of a far more intricate pattern, as being nearer to real life, has a part to play in creating the interest of a novel. The fable, the core of story, the transaction, deserves the name of plot when gracefully by idealizing simplification it receives a pattern.

A novel, being "realistic," approaching the impression of natural things, bears a relation

to the artificially built composition not dissimilar to that which the painting of a subject bears to the conventional decorations used in a repeated pattern. Its unity is normally an immanent, guiding, controlling principle wrought out through a process which approaches nature in subtlety and delicacy of outline and gradation, and in infinity and complexity of relations. Yet sometimes even in novels repetitions of a somewhat mechanical type contribute to the symmetry and order of the work. Dickens, for example, obtains an external orderliness by repeating the speeches and characteristic actions of his persons. Mr. Tulkinghorn's habit of turning over his keys in his pocket, and Jerry Cruncher's forbidding his wife to flop, not only bring out the characteristics of Tulkinghorn and Jerry but maintain a fixed and somewhat excited tone in Dickens's works, and give them the attractiveness of ordered form. George Meredith, far less violently, utilizes the same means of effect; Sir Austin quotes the scrip; Adrian is ever and again marked as "discreet"; Miss Middleton is over and over a "rogue in porcelain." In especial the structure of *The Egoist* consists in Sir Willoughby's floundering deeper and

deeper in the same morass, perhaps with somewhat too little of variety of gesture. *Vanity Fair* has a plot not wholly unlike that of *The Three Bears.* Becky Sharp proceeds from adventure to adventure up to the great smash-up.

In a novel the unity of pattern is first of all present in the underlying conception realized in the work. This may be a purely intellectual problem to be solved; a novel may be made like a rebus or a word puzzle. The writer begins with the idea of a hidden crime. He knows who committed it; and then he conceals the guilty man so that suspicion shall be plausibly excited against everybody but the real criminal, but so that when the secret is revealed it shall seem obvious that the real solution is the only possible one. In the detective tales of Poe, an examiner who knows the answer has constructed an ingenious problem, and written it into a story (e.g., *The Murders of the Rue Morgue, The Purloined Letter*). Wilkie Collins (*The Woman in White*), and Sir Conan Doyle (the Sherlock Holmes stories), and James Payn (*The Lost Sir Massingberd*) do the same thing on a larger scale. Such narratives have indeed an interesting pattern and a

distinct and admirable quality of real though artificial unity; but their mechanical scheme and singleness of effect are on a far lower plane than that of true imaginative unity.

Such conceptions are simple and mechanical and to that extent insignificant. The conceptions proper to a novel are more complex and less distinct. *Tom Jones* has an idea, a fundamental conception. The book manifests the character of a young man, essentially generous and sympathetic toward others, but heedless, inconsiderate, and weak of will before the temptations of sense and "good fellowship." This man is exposed to a manifold experience; he is perpetually falling, but perpetually recovering. Fielding believes that however often and however low he might fall, he would yet be able to regain his self-control and his self-respect so long as he maintained his sincerity and the essential spirit of good-will to others. The ground conception of *Vanity Fair* is to present a contrast between two women's characters, one clever, brilliant, and attractive, even good natured in a way, but without *heart;* the other dull, not free from selfishness and petty weaknesses, but having real tenderness and a conscience. They lead their parallel

lives, the clever one going on from one hollow social success to another, and ending in dirty squalor; the other suffering bitterly but in the end attaining happiness. The doctrine is that no amount of intellect or charm can make up for the lack of the gentler virtues, but that *love* —sympathy and sweetness—are so precious that they not only compensate for the absence of all intellectual brilliance but elevate the characters and purify them of their meanness and smallness. The themes of Dostoevsky's novels are themes of compassion, of compassion without self-deceit or sentimentality. Human beings suffer all together, are at fault together, the virtuous with the sinful; and toward all, the rational feeling is of boundless pity, and of boundless sympathy. This theme is realized by Dostoevsky not as an abstract idea, but in the experiences of a group of imagined characters; as a force manifested in life.

The first virtue of a plot, then, is intensity of vision. The highest type of narrative arises from an energetic imaginative conception, taking possession of and filling the mind of the writer. If the matter be large and important, so much the better; but large or small, the

thing done should be seen as in the round, definite before the mind's eye, on the ground, complete. Such is the story in the first part of Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth,* or Scott's *Ivanhoe,* or Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* or Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd,* or Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.* In each of these there is a thing done, a fully imagined transaction which works itself out in a fully imagined world. From such completely realized imaginative ideas results a wholeness of texture and a natural unity. Even if the writer loses his vision at times and must recall it, if he admits irrelevancy, or is led astray by the desire to inculcate a doctrine, such a central imagination holds a work together; it may be ragged but it is centrally one. Thus it is with George Eliot's *Adam Bede,* in spite of the fact that her moral philosophy caused her to fail in faithfulness to her imaginative idea, which demanded the death of Hettie on the scaffold, and a real mutilation of the lives of Arthur and Adam. Yet even the appended narrative, a supplementary story, meant to teach us to make the best of life in all circumstances, cannot destroy the strength of the central vision.

The greater novels of the world, then, have a unity of theme, underlying concepts vividly realized. But this is not all of unity. A thing is not one because it has one end, one aim, one thought alone; it is built into one structure. This fitting of part to part in a novel gives the effect of sequence: the conception that incidents follow one another, grow out of each other—succeed each other in line and rank. The power of sequence is the story-teller's gift: it gives the springing elasticity of continuous movement to Scott's narrative when once he takes his stride. It is the gift of Stevenson. Sometimes even the smaller men have it. Trollope, and Besant, and Henry Kingsley are not so great as George Eliot or Zola, but they are better story-tellers by nature. They "look before and after," they feel the connection of part with part, they are not confused or disturbed, or halted in their advance, by the fact of having several "threads" of narrative to carry along. They keep them spinning out, they knot them together, they have always the sense of progress, even when they go back from one line to carry another. But in George Eliot, when she drops one thread of her narrative to draw up another, there is a

sense of effort; the explanation is over-ample, the story halts or stumbles.

The developed conception, then, fully expressed, and moving in orderly sequence from a beginning to an end, requires also a shapely definiteness to attain a finished unity. This definiteness is the effect of light and shade, of emphasis. So the unity of a work of fiction owes something to the degrees of salience of its parts. Contrast of part with part is one means—next perhaps to repetition the fundamental means—of emphasis. The *Three Musketeers; Soldiers Three;* the three *Brothers Karamazov;* the three Harlowes, the father and the two uncles of Clarissa, may serve as examples of one very obvious means of applying the method of contrast in characters to the working out of the conception of a novel. It is to be noted that in all these cases a fundamental parallelism underlies the contrast. Unless the Three Musketeers were in one profession, united by friendship, joined against one opponent, and associated for a single purpose, there would be no point in the contrasts between one and another. "Soldiers Three" are all British soldiers, of the lower class, ignorant but shrewd and of a special force of character,

and are united like the Three Musketeers. The brothers Karamazov have all a nervous excitability, an intensity and recklessness, and superior minds; they are "Karamazovs." The three Harlowes are Harlowes, pig-headed, small-brained, impulsive. So it is on a parallelism that a contrast is based. It is by startling contrasts that Hugo's grotesque effects are gained. It is a pity that he is controlled too little by his imagination, too much by the perverse will to be extreme; for the force of his ideas is undeniable. Contrasts of situation between his characters but above all contrast between the normal condition and the actual are his means of effect. It is a criminal escaped from the galleys who is his saint; a harlot's child is his petted incarnation of innocence; it is in a sewer that the highest heroism is manifested.

The contrasted stories of the sisters in *Pride and Prejudice,* especially the main plot of Elizabeth and the sub-plot of Jane, run parallel courses, accentuating the difference in the characters and their lives, giving definiteness and individuality to the central story, and binding all the tales together.

Recurrence of a motive with an increase in

intensity—*climax*—is a means of giving definiteness and unity to the structure of narrative. So there is a progress in *Vanity Fair,* in the importance of Becky's advances and failures up to the supreme audacity and the supreme failure. And in *Tess* each thwart accident seems the most envious trick that a grimly jocular Fate can play, till death comes at last to end the cruel game. In all these instances the story gets shape and singleness through the binding up of each section into unity by the climax which ends it, and all are bound together by the dominance of the great climax.

Clearness of outline and unity are gained by suspense. The curiosity is awakened, excited, titillated by a promised gratification only to be disappointed and excited again. Thus throughout the book all incidents are grouped, are brought into line by the mystery. Finally the solution relates the end to the beginning, and gives it consequence above all that intervenes. The method is effective, but only for one reading. Once the mystery is revealed the fun is gone; and gratification must be obtained from the incidents by the way, by the development in sequence, by the strangeness in harmony of

the things done, by the substantial greatness of the work. Surprise, then, is a device rather than a principle of structure, likely to be mechanical, and to contribute to a less significant result than less smart but more imaginative methods. As Coleridge well says: "As the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star compared with that of watching the sunrise at the pre-established moment, such and so low is surprise compared with expectation."

These are the main means of emphasis, of giving to a narrative that clarity of relation between the greater and the less which is essential to the unity of its form. There are other means: a firm beginning, a resonant ending, interruption, disconnection, staccato sharpness and voluminous amplitude; but these are secondary; they are devices of rhetoric or pieces of ingenuity. Repetition, Contrast, and Climax in the actual structure of the book are the vital means of emphasis. They enter into the conception of the whole and ramify through the book, build it and form it.

The novel, then, as a thing designed, has many analogies with pictorial designs. A fundamental idea, developed with sequence, proportion, and defining emphasis, give unity to

the pattern of both. The complexity of a transaction is likewise analogous to the complexity of patterns in form and colour. In an India shawl or a mediaeval German carved trellis there is a manifoldness, a union of many ideas in one effect. Consider a complex novel, say Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd.* It is the story of the winning of Bathsheba by Gabriel; but that story involves also the love of Bathsheba and Troy, the story of Troy and Fanny, the love of Boldwood for Bathsheba and its tragic end, the story of the farm affairs of Bathsheba and of Gabriel. Each is a transaction recounted by itself; but all may be capable of being one story. Bathsheba takes part in every transaction, and then every transaction helps or hinders Gabriel's wooing. The device of uniting many narratives by having the same main character in all is an easy artifice by which to produce at least the appearance of unity. But unless there is not only one hero but one transaction, one dominating piece of business to which each action contributes, the thread is a mere excuse, and the story drops to pieces. So it is with Dickens's *David Copperfield,* where the successful establishment of David in life at his second marriage is not in-

teresting enough or sufficiently in the foreground to unite all the subsidiary narratives into a unit. The tale of David's childhood, of Steerforth and Emily, of Micawber and Heep, of David's marriage with Dora, are all separate, attached to David, but not subdued to one main narrative. Likewise in *Middlemarch:* the *affair* of Dorothea does not bind the facts into one. There is an interesting contrast and relationship of the different narratives and characters, but no one commanding thing is done.

A plot may be complicated by making the subsidiary transactions contribute to the achievement of a single end,—by making each group of forces act upon the other so as to produce a single result. Thus in *Pride and Prejudice* the separate transactions, the marriage of Collins and Charlotte, by bringing Lizzy to Pemberton, the runaway match of Wickham and Lydia by justifying Mr. Darcy, and by giving him an opportunity to exercise his tactful generosity, all move together to overcome the obstacles of Lizzy's Prejudice and Darcy's Pride. It is perhaps from recognizing the pleasant, ingenious activity of the novelist's skill in draughting plots that one great source

of the pleasure of the reader who "reads for the story" arises.

The "sub-plot" is one of the devices by which the skilful constructor lends complexity to his fables. A narrative parallel to the main one illustrates it by contrast or similarity, and contributes to its development. The treatment of the sub-plot is a problem of the utmost difficulty: it must be interesting enough to engage the attention, but not so interesting as to challenge the superiority of the main subject, to the effect of which it should contribute by its power of contrast or parallelism. The sub-plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the very few that accomplishes this. The love-affair of Jane and Bingley awakens an agreeable sympathy without overriding the superiority of the more brilliant and decisive Elizabeth and Darcy. The fortunes and careers of the two sisters are sufficiently similar and sufficiently emphasize alike the resemblances and the differences of their characters, and the one transaction contributes to and moves along the other. Antithetic plots dividing the interest equally between two heroes or heroines are not likely to be successful. In *Vanity Fair* the seesaw effect scatters the interest and makes

it difficult to keep continuous movement going on.

We may distinguish between the complexity of ingenious construction and the complexity of nature, the one infinite alike in power and subtlety, the other wonderful but by will, with a certain restlessness or a sense of smartness.

Higher than this effect of clear but complicated patterning, of clever and dashing draughtsmanship, is the more significant and the subtler quality of gradation and the suggestion of infinity; for delicacy involves infinity. It is contrast and emphasis which are finite. As regards plot, the higher complexity is manifested not in haze or indefiniteness, but in the suggestion of mystery and of a depth in causation and effect. There is something of this quality in *Henry Esmond* as a story. We read it, follow it, understand it; but when it is done it is like life. It is natural; but we feel that there is still something unrecorded, that much in himself has been dimly felt but not revealed even by the autobiographer. There is something of this quality also in Meredith, in Turgenev, in Tolstoy. There is something untold about the causes of the things that have happened in their plots; there is a blended edge

about their characters and their motives, as there is about real persons.

In general usage the name of *plot* or *fable* is confined to a transaction taking place in the outer world: the world of physical fact. The moral development or decadence of a soul is a subject of great, of fearful interest, and it may well be the main theme of a narrative; but unless it is made evident by a system of events in the world of fact it is not by most people thought of as constituting a story. Tito must go from deceit to actual treason and must commit base murder; Romola must not only grow in inner strength and sweetness but must in fact refuse to obey Savonarola, must care for the plague-stricken peasants and bring up Tessa's children. It is not enough for the nature to be manifest; it must do the deeds which manifest its change. And in fact, as most readers feel, the events of the narrative must have a certain connection and consistency, must make up a series, which have a pattern or development apart from the character development connected with them. A biography of wandering and experience, of incident following incident connected only by the sense of growth and change in the character is not what

most people would call a genuine plot, however natural and rational and interesting it may be.

This idealized, simplified, and so heightened action, this that we call a plot, is often thought and spoken of as the prime necessity of the story. Of the drama Aristotle declares it to be the *soul.* But for the novel, the elaborate patterning of the transaction is not so vital. Ingenious construction and neat finish, even singleness of structure, are not so essential in this type of composition. Certainly the greatest English novelists are not great draughtsmen, or skilful finishers of plots. Certainly not Scott, or Dickens, or Thackeray, nor Meredith or Hardy, nor Bennett or Wells. The plot-makers are smaller figures, like Wilkie Collins. The close-knit structural quality of Hardy's *Return of the Native* is seldom found in the English novel in union with the greater imaginative qualities.

The narrative of a novel is composed of the narrative of separate events; of incidents. The fable is of various classes according to the relation of these events to the whole narrative. In one class of story—that which is in construction most like a play—the central theme is

dominant throughout. The story begins with an exposition of conditions, followed by the introduction of the force, the struggle of which with opposition makes up the body of the narrative. This struggle is divided into the rising action, or complication, and the falling action, or solution. The transition from the rising to the falling action is the crisis or climax. The story ends with a new condition of affairs, destined to be stable, unless changed by another force—the catastrophe or dénouement. At marked points of transition from stage to stage in the progress of the action there are minor crises; but the distinguishing feature of this type of plot is that it has but one central movement upward and downward, and that accordingly it has but one climax.

Novels with plots of this kind are Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess.*

The story of *The Warden* is that a sweet-tempered and delicately scrupulous English gentleman and clergyman held the office of Warden of an ancient charitable establishment —a hospital or asylum for twelve poor wool-carders of his town. There were no more wool-carders there, and the literal fulfilment of the

terms of the will had become impossible. But twelve poor men, so-called wool-carders, were well cared for; and the Warden, who was precentor of the Cathedral and had brought its music to a high pitch of excellence, enjoyed a comfortable and indeed beautiful living from the foundation. An energetic movement for an inquiry into the honest enforcement of the provisions of various old endowments was led by a certain John Bold—who was, as it happened, the lover of the Warden's daughter. A violent and vulgar liberal paper in the town brings in question the strictness and loyalty with which the terms of the will establishing the Hospital are obeyed. Bold will not push the investigation; but the Warden cannot be happy in his position until he can be assured by good legal authority that he is entitled to the emoluments of the wardenship. His conservative son-in-law, the Archdeacon, is indignant. He urges the Warden that not only as a sensible man, but as a representative of his own party or group he must not yield to the absurd radical attack upon him; but the more delicate and scrupulous Warden comes slowly and painfully to the conclusion that he cannot retain the place with a doubt in his own mind as to

the propriety of his action. He resigns, gives up his beautiful garden, reduces himself to straitened means. In time his daughter marries Bold, and the Precentor, no longer Warden, comes to spend so much of his time at their house that he permits his beloved violoncello to be taken there. The wardenship is left vacant, the Bishop being unwilling to put any gentleman into the cruel position in which the Warden had been placed.

Here there is one transaction—the Warden's being brought by the scrupulousness of his conscience to resign. The exposition acquaints the reader with the settled conditions of the little cathedral town, the rising action begins with the suggestion of an inquiry into the administration of the ancient foundations, the crisis is reached with the Warden's flight to London in order to consult his legal adviser away from his overwhelming son-in-law the Archdeacon, and the downward action follows, swiftly progressing from the resignation to the establishment of a new order of things in the Precentor's life, and in the administration of the trust.

Likewise in *Tess:* the narrative expounds the state of life into which Tess is born, the

wretched condition of the family, and the ancient dignity of the D'Urberville name. The forces of active evil in the world about her begin to be manifested in her exposure to Alec D'Urberville; those moving toward her protection and happiness in the love of Angel Clare. The contention of the two makes up the struggle of the story; and when Angel Clare after his marriage to Tess leaves her upon learning of her relations with Alec, the supreme climax is reached. Tess has been rescued from wandering in the desert of misery, surrounded with protection, led to look into a promised land of happiness. She is dashed from hope; then the reappearance of Alec, and Tess's renewal of relations with him to help her family, lead on to the final desperate act of Tess, in taking his life; and the catastrophe, the execution of Tess, merely signalizes a victory already gained by the sardonic evil of the world. The story is not only one, but each smaller part is part of the one. The upward movement is one and continuous, there is one climax, one downward course. Such a plot, analogous to that required for the highest dramatic effect, may be called a dramatic plot.

In other novels, however, though there is a

single transaction, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, there is no single rising or falling action; there are several points of culmination, several sections of pretty level interest, but no one dominant climax. Such is Thackeray's *Pendennis*. In it there is a transaction: Pen goes through the period of youth, has his love-affairs and his troubles, "finds himself," and gets settled in life. But he does not go straight to the bottom, and come back from the lowest depths to the top; he has his affair with the Fotheringay, and his difficulties with Deuceace and the paper; he is being formed into a man, and he wins a place as a clever writer, and a place in life. Each part of the narrative is a part of one whole, but there is no overmastering central incident, toward and from which the story moves. Such a narrative has a singleness and an effect of design in the relation of the incidents such as justify the name of plot; it may fairly be called an epic, as distinguished from a dramatic plot.

But the relation of the parts to the whole may be looser. A story may have a thread of narrative running through it, holding it together, but its real interest may be in the separate tales grouped about the central narrative,

somehow related to it, but making up as a whole no single transaction. Such is *David Copperfield.* In a way, the growing up of David from infancy to manhood, and his establishment in life is a thread of narrative. But the stories of Steerforth and Uriah Heep are not part of the central story, but are suspended from it, like Chinese lanterns on a string. Such a story has a connected *fable,* but not a sufficiently designed and interrelated narrative to deserve the name of *plot;* it may, for convenience, be called an episodic fable.

There are books called novels in which even this thin thread of events is lacking, and incidents follow in sequence, the real interest being in these individual incidents. The work has only the unity of consistency of tone, and a grouping about a central character to produce some effect of design. Such is *Pickwick Papers.* No transaction is discoverable here, running throughout the book, even as a thread. Mr. Pickwick and his friends might have any number of adventures, or might have missed any one of those which they had. They rise to no one height of happiness, and fall into no one depth of misery or misfortune, but go plunging from one ludicrous accident to the

next. They are always the same; we are at home in the book, because we meet old friends wherever we open it. And when it is closed it is finished. Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick can no more come back. Yet the book is not one structure. If it has a single life, it is like that of the worm which, on being cut in two, quarrelled in its two parts as to which should carry on its diary. Some critics deny the name of novel to such a narrative. And yet, in the special atmosphere which pervades it, in its temper and quality, it is in a way single. The incidents of *Pickwick* belong to *Pickwick,* and to no other book.

If a name be needed by which to designate this genial type of narrative, we may call its fable a linked fable.

Narratives which have unity in the transaction achieved must plainly contain three parts: the beginning, the middle, and the end. Aristotle's definition is quaint, but not so foolish as it sounds. The beginning is that which does not of necessity follow upon anything else, but after which something else inevitably follows; the end is that which naturally follows upon something else, either by inevitable law or by a general tendency, but after which nothing

else need follow. The middle is that which naturally follows upon something and leads to something else. These words imply that to tell the story of a transaction effected by a force one must make clear what the force works on, and must also make clear when the force begins its work. At the beginning there is a condition of things which will not change until something changes it; a world, so to speak, little or big which is complete and stable unless some force disturbs its stability. Perhaps it is a little village, in which everything seems as if it had always been the same from the beginning of days, and would always be the same until the end of days; perhaps it is a family group, unaware of any impending vicissitudes of fortune; perhaps it is just an unformed boy, waiting for the influences which are to mould him and help to make his life. A force enters; a visitor from the city comes to the village, a child expresses ambitions alien to the sympathies of his elders, the boy is told something which he did not know about his ancestry. Nothing was needed before this beginning, but now the workings begun must be followed by consequences. To understand the middle of the working of the force, everything that went

before is requisite; and again the activity has no meaning except in its consequences. The middle needs the end;—the end, when the force completes its cycle by creating a new condition of things, which will remain unchanged until a new force works upon it. The village belle has married the city man or her old lover, and the village settles back in relief; the family has lost its unity or grown stronger; the boy has lost his life in the struggle of his people, with whom he has thrown in his lot, or has won the throne of his ancestors. A cycle is completed. A force working under the law of necessity or general tendency is followed from the instant when it broke in upon one order of things, big or little, worked upon it, and brought it to a new order of things, which it would require a new force to modify.

It is common to speak of that beginning as best which is briefest and most "dramatic,"—clearing the way for the interaction of the forces which make up the real story in the quickest and liveliest way possible. But the truth is that the nature of the beginning is determined by the nature of the narrative which it is to introduce; the fundamental idea of the narrative should dominate the author in the

approach to the story, as well as in its working out. The prime question is, then, whether the introduction is of the right temper and matter for the particular narrative which follows, not whether it is long or short, dramatic or descriptive. The novels of Scott, in which the background is very full, and in which the themes are the contrasts and struggles between great bodies of men,—Scotch and English, Highlander and Lowlander, Cavalier and Covenanter,—require an amplitude and weight above those of moral conflicts within the soul or between individuals. This is still more the case when the setting is slight. Thus George Meredith's novels, being psychological in theme and giving little sense of an outer world or of a large and complicated social order, require less introduction than Scott's. But with this proviso, the idea that brevity and a dramatic quality are merits of the beginning is entirely true. It is indeed a fault in Sir Walter Scott that his beginnings should not only be slow, but should be abstract and didactic. Though his themes are large and weighty, yet if they were as thoroughly realized from the outset as they become later, they could be presented imaginatively and not in the abstract, by action

and not by explanation. On the other hand, Miss Jane Austen is entitled to the praise universally given to the famous beginning of *Pride and Prejudice* for its immediate, clear, simple, dramatic, and witty initiation of the reader into the life within which the narrative is to be developed.

The end of a novel of the finest type of construction has as its prime merit that it maintains the unity of the book by bringing the transaction to its natural issue; "it is that after which nothing more is necessary." A good ending, then, does not leave its narrative fragmentary; whether by suggestion or by explicit declarations, it presents the well perceived consequence and conclusion of the forces which have created the narrative. But endings generally, if they err, err not by leaving the work incomplete, but by adding irrelevant details—by saying more than enough, or by beginning the suggestion of new narratives. The good ending concludes the essential narrative, sufficiently and not redundantly, and if possible by exciting the imagination—by a significant act or speech, and not by elaborate explanation. Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities,* it is often said, should have ended: "And the

knitting women counted twenty-three." The marriage of Charles and Lucie, and the re-establishment of the shaken household in London, could have been taken for granted. Scott's ends are hasty, improbable, and lacking in justification, and yet often overloaded with "unconcerning things—matters of fact." Indeed our great novelists of the earlier nineteenth century, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, are generally indifferent to the endings of their tales, as Shakespeare is to the endings of his plays. It is part of the economy of a more conscientious art—not necessarily the power of a higher genius—which causes the ends of *The Return of the Native* and of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* to come to a finer, sharper, and clearer last touch than is common in the "classic" novelists. Arnold Bennett in *The Old Wives' Tale* gives the reader the sense of the slow subsiding of life's force, and brings his narrative to a clean ending, without diffuseness or inadequacy.

The "weakness of the spectators" is given by Aristotle as the reason why the happy ending, even when it is not justified by the course of the drama which it concludes, is preferred to the unhappy one. As Henry James wittily

suggested, the readers look at the ending of the novel as the dessert. Their taste is youthful; the ending must be sweet and it must be abundant. Many readers also like it soft. So everybody is brought to the footlights; and with a "Bless you, my children!" all the pairs are dismissed by a kindly grandpapa to happiness, and all the decent old people are left to their reposeful nodding and knitting in the evening of their life. It is perhaps not wonderful that some irritated novelists should have been perversely unkind to their characters, and despotic to their plots, and should have ended plots and characters with unreasonable harshness and sternness. Here as elsewhere the law of unity of tone and probability should rule. A novel of tragic tone throughout is impertinently concluded by a happy ending, while a comic tale is ridiculous without its comic ending,—unhappy only for the rogues and the butts. A genuinely serious narrative is the more impressive if it end with a catastrophe; but the question is not so easy for tales of mixed sunshine and shadow, and especially for nervous stories;—tales of frivolous and superficial characters, whose sorrows are legitimately only annoying. Sometimes it seems to

me that Thomas Hardy has taken some of his characters too solemnly—that Eustacia, for instance, has no right to so august an end as death, and that she should have been left to a dusty and fretted life.

The comparison of the narrative to the solution of a problem, the definition of it as a process of the same kind as those taking place in the world of "Nature," the recognition of its "laws" as comparable to those of science, produce the impression that a well-made narrative in itself is a dry and bare thing, an abstractly definite thing. But these comparisons are intended to insist upon the nature of the plot as a unit, and to make clear that it is not unique, but that it is like the other simplifications of life which are necessary for intellectual and practical purposes. The transactions which make up a plot are not interesting simply because they begin somewhere and end somewhere else, but because they pass along a road every step of which has its excitement or its delight. Novels are not like chemist's operations, where the thing of importance is what you start in with and what you come out with, but things in which every bubble, every fizzing, every change of hue, is interesting. It is

not the cold formula of a love story that attracts and enchants: some human beings are living in an ordered group (exposition) among them a young woman and a young man evidently destined to be married to each other (beginning of the action); there are obstacles in the way (complication); the obstacles seeming too great to be overcome, a way out is hinted (crisis); the difficulties are removed (falling action); though just at the end a hitch occurs (final suspense); which is cleared away, and the marriage takes place (the catastrophe). This is like the story of a Seidlitz powder. The contents of a blue and a white paper are separately dissolved. The two colourless solutions stand in two crystal glasses. Mix them: they begin to effervesce, they boil over stormily, they subside to quietness; at the end there is one colourless solution in one crystal glass. It is the interest in these particular young people (the more unusual they are the more interesting), in their particular situation (the more uncommon, but natural, the more interesting), with their particular troubles solved in their particular way, and their particular feelings, that, combined in the framework of the probable and ordinary, gives interest to the tale. It is

the love-story of Jane and Rochester, of Lucy and Richard, not any love-story. And what has been called the problem of a novelist is not making a plot, not working out a formula, but perceiving what these definite and complex people, in their definite and complex situation, would enact as a definite and complex transaction. The problem is concrete and actual, not abstract.

The union of the normal and the exceptional attends the writer all the way at every step of his journey. Each speech may be a surprise, —the revelation of a thing natural, but unexpected, perhaps astonishing. Each situation may be new, but just what was to have been expected when it does happen. So the union of the marvellous with the probable appears in the fable not only in the prime conception and building up of the structure, but in the detail of the evolution, and in the working out of the idea into actuality. There is even place for a certain whim, a certain strangeness,—not excessive,—for even in normal life absolute rigidity of inevitable sequence would itself appear as abnormal, as monstrous. An occasional run of luck is a mathematical necessity.

According to the temperament and imagina-

tion of a writer one or another aspect of the plot is likely to be emphasized. One man has a stronger sense of symmetric relation, and less of interest in abundance and variety. His novels are likely to be insistent upon inevitable sequence and to dwell upon a fundamental idea, —to be not so much ample and rich as energetic and distinct. So Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh* and Meredith in *The Egoist* accent what may be called the ground idea relatively often and sharply. Another writer delights in detail and abundance; and such a man is likely to be exuberantly fertile in incident. Thus as Sir Walter Scott genially confesses when charged with negligence in construction: "When I light on such a character as Bailie Jarvie, or Dalgetty, my imagination brightens, and my conception becomes clearer at every step which I take in his company, although it leads me many a weary mile away from the regular road, and forces me to leap hedge and ditch to get back to the regular road again. If I resist the temptation, as you advise me, my thoughts become prosy, flat, and dull; I write painfully to myself, and under a consciousness of flagging which makes me flag still more; the sunshine with which fancy had invested the

incidents, departs from them, and leaves everything dull and gloomy." Some authors delight in whim and coincidence, others abhor them. Fielding's telling irony and somewhat impertinent improbability press coincidence to the limit, perhaps beyond the limit, of acceptability, while Henry James's novels and tales, however slight, are attended with an equally ironical fatefulness, uncomfortable or humorous.

We are offended not with marvel, but with marvel unreconciled; not with a strange thing but with a strange thing left to seem unreasonable, and especially with a contradiction. An accident—a merely superficial improbability due to neglect or carelessness is a fault but a slight fault. It is more likely to amuse than to offend the reader. Robinson Crusoe, in the first edition of the story of that name, swam ashore, naked, and soon after found his pockets full of biscuit. The seasons get mixed in *Tom Jones*. Thackeray accidentally called Philip Firmin Clive Newcome, and set the pioneers to tapping, for sugar, the maple-trees brilliant with the colours of Autumn. Such errors are obvious and external, and are proportionally insignificant. They do not affect the life or the

imaginative energy of the novel, but are smiled over and forgotten.

Even violent external improbabilities meant simply to get a hero out of a scrape are likely to be so frank and naïve that they amuse without offending. Senior in his criticism of Scott's *Rob Roy* is amused by the outrageous violence of the dénouement. "The author himself as he goes on, finds himself so thoroughly involved in the meshes of his plot, that seeing no legitimate extrication, he clears himself at last by the most absolute, we had almost said the most tyrannical exercise of the empire which authors must be acknowledged to have over their personages and events, which we recollect, even in the annals of that despotic class of sovereigns. . . . He had resolved that his hero should after the custom of heroes, enjoy the family estate and marry the heroine. But the estate is in the hands of an uncle, with six healthy sons; the heroine is pledged either to marry one of them or to take the veil. . . . An ordinary novelist . . . would not have killed all the six sons by different violent deaths, and the father of a broken heart for their loss, within the space of six months. If the sudden death of one person be a most inar-

tificial mode of bringing about a catastrophe, what shall we say of this literary execution of a whole family?"

Now all this is a fault in Scott, it is a serious fault, but it is not a mortal fault. The profoundly, the essentially offensive improbability is the contradiction in the action of some inner law or tendency of the whole book, either in tone or idea. This is a malady of the soul of the novel, not a mere blotch or blemish marring its beauty but not sapping its life. *The Count of Monte Cristo* is infected with this kind of inner self-contradiction, the savagery of the spirit of revenge being opposed to the generous nature of the Count, and the general idea that the wicked nature will bring on its own punishment being worked out too mechanically to have any moral interest, although a moral interest is insisted upon. The dead man's treasure and the wrong done to Dantès are entirely acceptable as the data of a narrative, but the tale developed from them depends too much upon violent assumptions and extraordinary coincidences to be agreeable except to very young people. On the other hand, *The Three Musketeers* is so consistently marvellous in spirit, so genially a tale of mere

adventure, that it in no way contradicts its own nature by its marvels. George Meredith violates the whole rationalistic and superficially subtle logic of *The Egoist* by making the successive egoistic acts of Sir Willoughby so crude and stupid; the Egoist ceases to be a moral problem and becomes the butt of an allegory. Dostoevsky contradicts the sense of causality which makes his novels seem fatal by endowing some of his pure and noble characters, for example, Father Zossima, not merely with natural wisdom, but with practically miraculous insight. In all these cases there is an inner improbability, a failure of truth to the fundamental idea of the character or of the entire novel, which is not a mere superficial blemish, but a profound defect.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER

Characters, the characters of actual life, are hypothetical, transcendental, objects of faith, not of immediate experience. We know them wholly through symbols; just as we know characters in books. We infer these characters or we imagine them. In actual life we observe some of the symbols directly, in books we read a record of them, but in either case we create the character by the same processes, and the characters thus created have the same reality to us.

A character is only a hypothesis accounting for the phenomena offered by the conduct and appearance of our fellow beings; it is, in other words, the patterning of human relations which makes the perplexing confusion of our experience of humanity simple enough to be manageable. Moreover, a character in the actual world is a simplification by processes most nearly analogous to those of art, not of science. That is, it is concrete, not abstract, and is mainly the work of the imagination,

working not by direction but by inner necessity. We know that thick-chinned Tom with a lisp, not an abstract *A* or Richard Roe; we know him by our unconscious mind imagining what he must be. At the basis of the business of life, of our dealings with others in every relation, is a dimly artistic imaginative act, creating our belief in the characters of others, made more or less in the image of ourselves. The artist, whether poet or novelist, works in his fictitious world more intensely and more consecutively but in the same way in which we all must work in the world of our actual experience.

The argument against plots is very plausible, and so familiar that it requires no amplification. In outline it is as follows. There are no such things in nature: nothing begins or ends in reality. Life is confusing but rich; then an art which strives for symmetry and order is necessarily both false and thin. The "realist," then, and still more the "naturalist," can know only phenomena, as men do in actuality. Evidently, the same course of reasoning proves characters to be superficial inventions: life in its richness and continuity knows nothing so static or so inadequate as a personality. There

is no *we;* there is a "stream" of consciousness, a blending moving picture, a phantasmagoria, of impressions, some bright, some faint. The stream has its eddies and its return currents; it splits and reunites. To insist upon a unity of consciousness within, is like invoking the spirit of a river; the idea of personality is as obsolete as Father Thames or Father Tiber with his urn. He who disbelieves in plot, then, must if he is consistent go on to hold that the idea of character is not grounded in reason and to insist upon the sole legitimacy of the phenomenon, of the essentially fleeting, or of the immediate act.

Now no one can force his mind to such nihilism as all that; but there are books in which the authors have been so deeply interested in impressions that the characters are as little coherent as is consistent with the effect of sanity in the composition. Take the novels of the brothers Goncourt, for example. Mr. Arthur Symons says of them in the Encyclopædia Britannica, "To the Goncourts humanity is as pictorial a thing as the world it moves in; they do not search further than 'the physical basis of life,' and they find everything that can be known of that unknown force written

visibly upon the sudden faces of little incidents, little expressive moments. The soul, to them, is a series of moods, which succeed one another, certainly without any of the too arbitrary logic of the novelist who has conceived of character as a solid or consistent thing. Their novels are hardly stories at all, but picture-galleries, hung with pictures of the momentary aspects of the world." This is a sympathetic way of putting what is expressed with witty malice by Jules Lemaître. "There are empty spaces between the scenes; and there are empty spaces likewise in the development of the characters. It is as if we were looking at a house from the outside. A man walking about inside appears to us now at one window, now at another; and in the intervals we do not see him at all. The windows are the chapters in the novels of the Goncourts. And sometimes we look in at one of the windows expecting to see the man, but he does not go by at all."

Such in art is the logical conclusion of the infinitesimal philosophy, of the break-up of the movement of things into atoms of experience. But as the whole process of the intellectual construction of the world, though incapable of

justification from any point of view outside of itself, is yet unavoidable and intellectually compelling, because to depart from it is to commit intellectual suicide, so the application of the same method in art, resulting in the conception of the unity of character, and of unity in construction, will remain unshaken, being in fact no other thing than the necessary working of human nature in art. If in life we must accept the great guides of life, rationality and sympathetic intelligence, so we at least may accept the same guidances in the world of the imagination, and add to the charm of iridescence and the exhilaration of stimulated nerves the beauty and strength of composition and idea.

The manifestation of character, of course, is action. We know people by their actions; and first of all by their deliberate actions. Plainly it is in one point of view fair to judge characters by what men do when they consciously and clearly intend what they are doing. Men say of an act of impulse or passion, "I was not myself when I did that." It is by their *choices,* Aristotle declares, that the characters of men are judged. Our ideal is what we consciously pursue; and our ideal is

part of our character, even though we never attain it. A shrewd and careful observer of men in practical life forms his judgments of his associates slowly and after many corrections by their stable intentions, forgiving much, passing by much, in order to depend upon the second thoughts, the real self, of his friends.

So in books, we know people by their clear and well thought out purposes: as Dobbin in *Vanity Fair* and Henry Esmond are conscientious gentlemen by deliberate purpose. "Psychological" novelists, as they are called, depend upon the deliberate actions of their characters to make clear their inner nature. That they may exhibit the motives of their characters, they represent the characters as perfectly clear about their motives, and extremely definite in carrying out their purposes into action. The result is often curious and abnormal, almost uncanny, in its distinctness, for human beings are not generally very reasonable or very conscious about most of their actions. George Eliot's novels afford conspicuous examples of this exceedingly deliberate form of action, and her characters, especially the characters of whom she most approves, are proportionally unhealthy in their searching of

themselves, and the monstrous distinctness of their vital processes. Their moral skins are taken off, and their living muscles and nerves laid bare flinching and quivering before their own eyes. Still more, at the most crucial points in the story, at the points of greatest tension and excitement, when the action should proceed rapidly to its culmination, the movement of the narrative is precisely the contrary. It becomes slow and detailed in the extreme in order that the moral problem created by the events preceding may be exhaustively analysed. Thus *Romola,* though beautifully and powerfully conceived, becomes slow and chilly; and even in the earlier and fresher novels, even in *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch,* the pencil is bluntest where it should be sharpest, the climaxes are inadequate in energy to the richness and life of the setting and connective portions.

Although from one point of view deliberate action reveals the character more justly than impulsive action, from another point of view impulse is a truer index of character than considered choice. "There are some things a fellow can't do." There are some things upon which a man of a certain character cannot even deliberate. A decent man does not deliberate

about picking a pocket, though he might steal on impulse. The highest and the basest acts are impulsive;—"instinctive," as we say: martyrdoms, self-sacrifices, triumphantly successful deeds of brilliant achievement, as well as murders and betrayals, are done upon impulse. They have been long and unconsciously prepared for, and show what a character is, not what it is becoming, whereas the deliberate act may reveal tendencies which are victors but not yet conquerors. Morally the impulsive act may be higher or lower than the deliberate act; it may come from excited nerves or from the depths of the nature. There were two clergymen in a stage overturned in the West; a younger man, new in the ministry and an aged, pious, and kindly missionary, who had travelled many thousand miles and suffered many hardships in devoted labour for the good of others. When the two found themselves out of the stage, breathing hard, the elder man saw the younger wiping blood from his face.

"Why," said he, "are you hurt? How did it happen?"

The other looked at him strangely, and as he took away his handkerchief, the old clergyman saw the mark of his own boot-heel on his

younger brother's cheek. Thenceforth, I suppose he had new knowledge about humanity. His impulsive act revealed what an unknown nature he carried within himself; but I cannot believe that it revealed his true self to him.

A reprobate drunken engineer suffers an agonizing death by fire in order to save the lives of the hundreds of women and children on a river steamer. An impulse of power from some depth below consciousness welled up within the man and bore him upon its crest. And no account of character can leave out this element and be true to humanity.

In the great works of imaginative literature as in life, these impulses manifest themselves in crises,—at moments when there is no time or when the currents of life run too strongly for deliberation. Thus characters in genuine tragedies, in the works which most powerfully and most permanently command the imagination,—Lear and Cordelia, Antigone, Anna Karenina, Richard Feverel,—though they may have long deliberated, act on impulses leaving them no choice, act as they must, considering what they have grown to be. In Sir Walter Scott's novels his deliberating characters, introduced that the reader may sympathetically

apprehend that there are two sides in the great contest which is the theme of the story, consider which side they shall take, and shift, it may be from Bonny Prince Charley to Hanoverian George. They impress us as imbeciles like Waverley, or nonentities like Ivanhoe or Osbaldistone. His active and interesting characters, rascals sometimes, and always stained or tainted men,—Marmion, Rob Roy, or Claverhouse, act with energy and decisiveness at the crises of the story. "In spite of myself," as he himself declares, "my rogue always turns out my hero."

Habitual action fills a large part of real life. It is the main source of moral strength, and it releases the mind that it may live in a free world, and deal with truly interesting subjects. Now habit is neither deliberate nor impulsive. It is "second nature," not the less natural because it is acquired, and in a degree artificial. But in books habit is uninteresting, because it is fixed. It is mainly our own daily habits, our dulness, our monotonously repeated impressions and experiences, from which we wish to escape in books, and which the novelist instinctively omits. For habit is static, and hence without power to excite fear or curiosity.

Therefore in novels habit takes a minor place. It is one element in the tone, the ground colour, of a character, as Adam Bede's singing of Bishop Ken's morning hymn gives the impression of his pure and sober steadfastness, not dull and unimaginative, but possessed of an ennobling ideal. Habit, in particular, is often a means of accentuating particular features of a character for comic effect, as Dickens labels his characters by external habits. like the tickets on the figures of an old-fashioned caricature. Captain Cuttle "makes a note of it," Mrs. Gamp refers to Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Cruncher "flops," and her husband forbids her to flop. But it is only the grotesqueness of these habits which redeems them from tediousness, and the less extraordinary iterations of admirable characters, meant to raise a sympathetic smile,—Mark Tapley's "Jolly!" and Mr. Cheeryble's "Don't you, Brother?" soon become very flat.

In actual life we "know" people, that is, form our personal visions of them, not so much by these gross and plain and large totals of movement that we call acts, as by little things, —acts indeed, as we see if we consider them closely, but minute, not obvious acts,—by ways

of standing, firm or shaky or shifting, by ways of grasping the hand in salutation, by the muscular movements which give expression to the eyes, by smiles, by the tones of a voice. The scriptures speak of a man with a "high stomach"; slang used to speak of a "chesty" man; one youngster whom I knew had the reputation of having the laziest *back* in college. But it is not even by these things, by "little nameless unremembered acts,"—unremembered, indeed not separately observed, that we form our most delicate judgment of character. We judge people by their choice of words, or of neckties; by the delicacy of their finger-tips, by the lines in their faces, which say, "I have suffered for others,"—"I have indulged my lusts,"—"I have thought,"—"I have dyspepsia." Perhaps we form judgments as much as in any other way by the impression of physical qualities easily apprehended, though not easily named, by a certain ivory pallor, by bony knuckles, by a "slab cheek and an oyster eye." These are the things that make us say:

> " I do not like thee, Doctor Fell;
> The reason why, I cannot tell;
> But this I know, and know full well,
> I do not like thee, Doctor Fell."

It is a characteristic of modern prose that in all fields it strives to reproduce emotional effects by suggestion; to give the special shiver of the scene, to reproduce the special thrill of the moment. So the novel of recent years strives more than the earlier novel to suggest the *atmosphere* of a personality, the quality, touch, feeling of it. This is what Dickens's labels are meant to do, a trifle mechanically—Mr. Carker's teeth and the dimples in the Marquis's nose when he grew angry; this is the object of Meredith's more delicate reiteration that Clara Middleton is "a rogue—in porcelain," and that "Sir Willoughby has a leg." It is the aroma and the warmth of personality that give the charm to Mr. Hardy's description of Bathsheba Everdene on top of the wagon, looking at herself in the little swing mirror, merely to enjoy the reflection of her own beauty. The same writer intimates the refinement and grace of Fancy Day by a hundred touches, among them the delicacy of her slim boot-last.

Sometimes the intimation of character is effected by the sudden flashing rightness of a single phrase, sometimes by a thousand soft touches of suggestion, but always imagina-

tively, not by the accumulation of what is intellectually perceived to be significant. Thackeray's easy and triumphant method is especially noteworthy for its power in suggesting character by the less tangible features of its manifestation;—its tone. So we know his personages by their ways and looks at least as much as by their deeds,—Beatrix, with her lustrous and melting brightness, Dobbin with his clumsy big hands and feet; we *see* the Colonel, the Baroness, and Mrs. O'Dowd, and how many more figures, gracious or quaint, to whom we turn back in thought as to acquaintances left behind in some town where we lived long ago. The Forsytes of Mr. Galsworthy are all pale, all have a sense of property and a certain steadfastness of chin; all are alike in solidity and mundane fitness, and all are different. The very joint at their festal dinners is symbolic. As the reader comes to know them, he seems to be divining something half hidden, and has the same indistinct inexpressible fringe of impression about them as about his daily acquaintance.

The conscious and complete physical description of a character is a frequent means by which writers intend to communicate their

impressions, but it is not likely to be effective. The orderly and rational symmetry of such description is too conscious and too cool: it rouses no stir of feeling. Moreover it seldom has unity, the real unity of evolution from within. The attention refuses to hold the first detail until the last is reached, and commonly also loses the whole in the parts. Even in Sir Walter Scott, his mechanically complete and elaborately outfitted personages,—Rebecca with her turban and simarre and agraffe,—would chill the warmth and check the current of any stream of invention less copious and powerful than his own. Sometimes these elaborated descriptions are false and manifest a lack of imagination of the whole scene, an abandonment to a childish delight in detail. For example, as Professor Maigron points out, when the palmer Ivanhoe enters the dusk of a firelit room, he is described to the thongs on his sandals (which would be out of sight below the table).

But when written with enthusiasm and imaginative intensity, even a pretty long description may hold together from beginning to end, though more by its fire than its system. Mr. Thomas Hardy's detailed account of Eustacia

Vye in *The Return of the Native,* "fitter to be a goddess than a woman," is a series of discoveries, exciting and somewhat alarming. The long description never lets the reader drop his attention, and its progress, from the suggestion of slumberous fire in her somewhat heavy but noble figure, to the darkling nocturnal look of tragedy in her face, maintains a tension of questioning anxiety which causes the reader to forgive even the pedantry of describing the curve of her lips as a "cima recta or ogee," and of the reference to the "ulex Europaeus."

In addition to inferring people from observation, we know them by report and by the impression they produce on others. Indeed, a cloud of impressions hangs about every man in real life, his reputation making up a great part of the vision of him in every man's mind. This reputation is as much a part of one's personality as one's manners or one's coat. Likewise in books; the characters of great persons in historical novels, are manifested by the impressions produced on others, especially on the heroes. Lincoln in *The Crisis,* and Elizabeth in *Kenilworth* are examples. In Richardson's *Pamela* we know Pamela by what Mr. B. thinks of her, and by what Lady Davers

thinks of her, and by what the Countess thinks of her, and by what Lady Davers thinks of what the Countess thinks of her, and by what the Countess thinks of what Mr. B. thinks of her. A kind of image of the characters is spun in this way, a gossamer image, shimmering and light, but very real.

In brief, we know people in novels by the same means and with the same sense of reality as we know actual persons. Moreover in some ways we know them better. The novelist can enter the minds of his characters and expound their thoughts and motives. Dickens knew what Jonas Chuzzlewit thought after he had committed the murder in the wood; he tells the reader Jonas's feelings about the storm, about the leaves on the trees, traces his dread into the hidden places in his mind, and reveals the most secret feelings of his dark nature. So George Eliot tells us flatly what Tina (in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*) thought as she fondled the dagger in the garden.

Now it may be admitted that it is an evidence of inferior talent or of haste and lack of preparation to make much use of the abstract method of presenting character. An imaginative gift may be conceived so great and intense,

and a concentration of mind so energetic, that the exposition of character becomes needless, disappears in the vividness with which the character is realized. Tolstoy, for instance, much as he deals with ideas, seldom intrudes analysis into the representation of his personages, elaborate and subtle as their psychology is. But to attain his end he is obliged to make his books enormous; the reader feels lost in his vastness, or in that of Zola. Is it not possible that something might be said for the economy of space achieved by *some* analysis, some direct exposition of the inner movements of the characters, leaving the more energy for the most intense parts of the narrative?

The expository method is colder and less likely to be exciting to the imagination than the so-called dramatic method, the manifestation of character by means of outward acts accompanied by no comment. In practice, however, a modest amount of exposition is a sheer necessity in some intimate studies of character. As Shakespeare was obliged in order to communicate the inner life of Iago or Juliet to resort to the unnatural device of a soliloquy, so Eliot or Hardy or Wells is simply forced to tell us

frankly the motives and the thoughts of Hetty or Tess or Hilda. And the reader, once the illusion is created and the movement of the narrative has begun to carry him along with it, once he cares about the character, may well find the analysis of the character as exciting, indeed as dramatic, as any obviously striking, external event. The analysis becomes to him, as to the writer, a series of discoveries,—a sequence; the development of it is itself a plot.

Though a character is sometimes reasoned out, like a scientific hypothesis, in order to find an explanation for actions, it is never believed in until it is imagined—until by the synthetic power of the imagination it is made one with itself in all its parts, and made one with our own natures, as something the springs and sources of which we may not be able to define but can yet sympathetically apprehend, and can conceive of as possibly moving ourselves.

The imagination of the reader creates the character as one thing not because it is a symbol or formula or expression of one overmastering tendency, but a thing alive with a single life. So even personalities complicated, difficult, fumbling, unsure of themselves, or in-

articulate,—Silas Lapham or Rudin,—become very real and complete and single to us as a result of our imaginative re-creation of them. Even their inconsistencies appear inevitable,—just as we know that human beings are inconsistent without ceasing to be coherent. On the other hand, a more profound inconsistency, an inconsistency which the mind refuses to ratify, results when a character goes contrary to its own fundamental direction and settled tendency. A reversal of the current of a man's whole nature is not to be effected without the intervention of an enormous force; and the adequate exhibition of such a reversal is one of the most difficult of problems. Only in a good-natured farce can such a change as Mr. Micawber's, for example, be tolerated, who has all his life been a kindly pompous dreaming idler in London, and becomes a successful man of affairs the minute he lands in Australia. Dickens on the whole abuses the novelist's privilege of assuming impossible data in the creation of his characters, for the purpose of using the characters as machinery in his novels. He manufactures men of business who are impossibly childish in Mr. Pickwick (the guileless innocent, as Bagehot observes, had made

his own fortune!) and Cheeryble Brothers; and he gives impossible purity to a street waif, Oliver Twist. His purpose is to create the special setting and emotional quality of his novels. His success is not derived from these characters, but depends on the situations which their existence makes possible for the really interesting personages,—for Sam Weller, or for Fagin. Without Mr. Pickwick's simplicity, Sam Weller's sharpness would lose its best opportunity, and its most effective foil; and by Oliver's sweet simplicity and helpless innocence, the vileness and cruelty of Fagin are given play to act, and receive the emphasis of contrast.

It is very plain that if the writer first and the reader after him create characters by the imagination, there must be something in common which serves as the material for the thought of both. This common element is human nature. No writer can create imaginatively a character the possibility of which he cannot find within himself. It does not follow that in fact he ever himself could *be* the character in actual life. Shakespeare, with his "large and comprehensive soul," included all his characters, but he could probably not have

actually submitted to be any one. He could not have been Richard III, for instance, because his nature had something within it that would have prevented him from obeying the impulse to draw power to himself at any cost, to exercise any cruelty, in order to manifest his own intellectual force. But he could think what it might have meant to him to be thwarted and embarrassed by a physical deformity, he could feel within himself the desire for power and deference, he could feel that if he could but cast aside some scruples he might make that desire the sole guide of his course, he could understand envy and hate and cruelty. He could think of himself as a king's son, he could conceive himself intellectually gifted above others, and resolved to make his ability manifest by ruling over others. In brief nothing could be present in Richard the elements of which he had not in his own mind, though the full growth of them might not have been permitted by opposing forces within himself. Could any man not a poet create the poetic temperament of Winterbourne and find words to express that which he never uttered? Could any one not capable of imagining his own special powers and graces taken away, and

himself reduced to basic torpidity, create the mumbling gaffers and clowns of Hardy's Wessex? Of a reader no such absolute manysideedness is required; but in his degree he must at least make out by his own nature what he should do if he were as the characters of imagination are, or they are unreal to him. All imaginative creation accordingly assumes a common basis of human nature, a common psychology. It is indeed by the imaginative effort required to make the difficult and remote possibilities of humanity our own that literary study affords its chief ethical discipline.

The sympathetic reading of imaginative works will not of itself gird up our loins and tone our moral fibres, or contribute to efficiency and moral energy, but it encourages tolerance and the understanding of others. It is a *humanizing* study: it reveals and develops that which men have in common, not that which separates them, and tends to make men therefore better able to live in the community of civilized life. Indirectly, too, it probably tends to refine the moral judgments, by making those things appear lovely that are lovely. Thus it contributes to the sweetness and beauty of life, if not to its force and energy.

The "probable" in character is that which is ordinary in humanity, and the "exceptional" or "marvellous" is the individual tendency to difference. Frank R. Stockton wrote a novel called *The Hundredth Man,* the theme of which is the theory of one of the characters that about one man in a hundred is extraordinary; and the narrative deals with his search for the hundredth man. In the story every person gradually manifests some eccentricity entitling him to be called a hundredth man. But though it is no doubt true that every human being is unique, it is no less certain that some human beings are more unlike the rest of the world than others. It is plain that the more extraordinary the person, the more interesting, if he is humanly intelligible at all. Hence we prize narratives dealing with personalities in any way distinguished from the ordinary, if we can make them real to ourselves. Such are Jean Valjean's sufferings and forgiveness, Christlike, save that he had sinned, Dugald Dalgetty's nut-cracker obstinacy and queerness, the steadfast colossal meanness of the Abbé Troubert in *The Curé of Tours,* and the sumptuously but pitifully selfish Eustacia Vye. The works which contain such characters are

more interesting to most people than works equal in other points of excellence but not distinguished by equally extraordinary characters, certainly than the novels of the pedestrian Trollope, or even than those of the brilliant Miss Austen.

But if the extraordinariness of the characters goes beyond what the reader can sympathize with, it becomes not interesting but shocking or disgusting. Thus a mad hero is inconsequential, but the process by which a mind in unstable equilibrium is overturned may be most interesting. Rogozin in *The Idiot* is of little interest, however painfully he is commented on, because after all he is not sufficiently normal and complete to be clearly comprehended; but the lovable Idiot, Prince Muishkin, who is made to endure so much so simply is interesting and credible. We suffer with him, and can understand how from the bed on which Nastasia lies "with a little wound under her left breast, where only a spoonful of blood came out," he can never go away an understanding, sane man. And as for Nastasia herself, what more easy to follow than the course of her brilliant, intense nature through her painful humiliations, her exaltations of devotion, to

sheer maniacal excitement, and the desire for insane revenge and for insane atonement?

It is not quite true that a completely criminal nature is beyond the pale of intelligent understanding and sympathy; for all of us can understand from within ourselves cruelty, outrage, unbridled ambition, the desire to wrong our neighbours, and every anti-social impulse. Yet criminal characters of so extreme a nature that they have no unselfish interest require so great an effort to be firmly conceived, require the casting off of so many inhibitions, that they commonly impress us as insane, as beyond the ken of normal minds. Such creations, then, are on a relatively low plane of imaginative creation. The extraordinary in them is so little blended with the probable that in books they impress us as violent efforts of the will, as unreal and harsh, that is, as lacking in the blended unity of natural things. Many writers have delighted in the attempt to create a complete and unrelieved villain: a moral monster which probably exists, and fascinates the imagination. As the central figure in a book, such a being throws it out of balance and makes it false and violent. Thus it is with Fielding's vigorous Jonathan

Wild, in which the traits, as Fielding declares, of an Alexander—his megalomania, selfishness, energy, and leadership—are attributed to a cruel thief, the organizer of a band of thieves. The book is a marvellously solid piece of construction, credible, observed with the utmost definiteness of vision, and energized by Fielding's grave and powerful irony. But it is not a great book, because its main character cannot be brought into sympathy with normal human ways of thinking and acting. The same thing is true of Thackeray's more subtly but no less powerfully drastic *Barry Lyndon*—the squalid tale of a gambler—or *Catherine,* the story of a peculiarly vile murderess. These narratives are not sufficiently human, not centrally true enough, to take place with the great normal works of the imagination.

Another type of work in which the author depends for the strangeness creating excitement upon characters extremely variant from normal humanity is one in which the personalities are excessively open to disturbance from impressions, "morbid" persons. The art of Hawthorne, exquisite and at one with itself, impresses me, I must admit, as thus "morbid." It seems to depend upon the peculiar sensitive-

ness of uncommonly delicate nerves, uncommonly exalted above normal experience.

In the work of Dostoevsky, a predilection for nervous invalids is to be found. They more than others are impressible and sensitive to the experiences of life; and they lend themselves the better to the impressionism, suppleness, and manifoldness of the art of the late nineteenth century. But in spite of this advantage, they unbalance and weaken the novels of which they are the central persons. Even though a more stable type of character may not be central, the very greatest works realize it as normal in the surrounding order of life.

As has been said, all art is a simplification of nature. This truth has been considered with reference to the fable; but it holds as well with regard to character. A character in life is an exceedingly variable, fluctuating, plastic, complex thing; it may well be that every human being is of infinite complexity. Who can know the depravity, or the nobleness, or the perversity possible in the nature of any human being? Such complexity, the complexity of nature's infinite resources, is beyond the power of imagination to create. Yet the novel since it approaches reality strives to make its characters

as much like those of real life as may be, to leave with the readers an impression like that produced by the subtle outline and complex substance of human nature as it is in actual experience. The main characters in novels are, therefore, in general relatively complex, the more complex the more nearly the novel approaches the effect of actuality. The romancer may deal with simplified characters—Long John Silver, or Leatherstocking—but the realist must suggest the complexity of reality, must represent characters which have not only outlines, but shadows and tints, like Hilda Lessways, or Pendennis, or Vezukhov. Complexity in itself, moreover, is a source of interest, in character as in every other element of the novel. Thus, speaking generally, the more realistic the novelist, the more subtle and complete his characters, and the finer the differences between them. So in Scott's romantic novels the main characters, Brian de Boisguilbert, or Jessica, or Vich Ian Vohr, or Allan Farebrother, are simpler than Miss Austen's Lizzie and Jane, or Thackeray's Pendennis, or Tolstoy's Anna Karenina or Vorontzov.

Yet some simplification is a necessary part of the work of the imagination. The vision of the

artist, creating his world anew, gives it a pattern of some distinctness, an ordering and therefore a simplicity not to be found in nature. The extreme of this simplicity in character is the clear and beautiful pattern of ideal literature. The types of humanity which appear in Homer's Iliad, or in Genesis, are simple men, and in them the fixed unchanging elements of the emotional life of man are vividly presented. The characters of Greek tragedy are specially clear examples of this idealizing simplification. In them the personages are great energetic natures, beautiful and human, but at one with themselves, carried along by powerful currents of nature with or against fate,—warm, intense, and real, but simple. They are far more than mere incarnations of passion, but their natures are at the time of the play dominated by the rule of some single overpowering tendency, and they are thought of mainly as expressing it. The characters of French tragedy are likewise patterned with simplicity, a simplicity more intellectual, more analytic, in which the personages are more conscious of the problems of their lives, and less completely the human expression of them. The fallen angels of Milton's *Paradise Lost* illustrate in their way the

same idealizing simplification; they are magnificent architectural cartoons of men of great affairs: Moloch the committee-man of direct action, Belial the committee-man who works by indirection, Beelzebub the strong, powerful, shrewd, conciliatory manager of a party, Satan the splendid, selfish leader of it. (The devils at least did not suffer the uttermost torment, that of doing business with the devil lower than Belial, the committee-man who will not meet an issue, but endeavours to kill action by technicalities and details.)

This is ideal simplifying, in which human nature is made grand by stress upon its fundamental emotions and great stable types. There is a false simplification, an imitative and external simplification. The true ideal simplification is due to the simple way in which the writer imagines men, and the false simplification to the judgment and will of the writer, who perceiving the power of the ideal figures, resolves that his imaginations shall be like them. He follows convention, as they follow reality, the reality of their own vision. Not being gifted with the intellectual and emotional energy requisite to imagine such simple figures, he cannot create them, and he makes only cold

imitations. The danger, then, of the conscious effort for heroic simplification is coldness and superficiality. There are a hundred forgotten epics and didactic poems of this sort, like the *Davideis* or *Gondibert,* which in spite sometimes of high poetic merit in detail are too cold and too *made* to hold the interest of any reader except as curiosities. The simplification of ideal beauty emphasizes but does not distort the fundamental elements of human nature. There is another simplification of character, a simplification which distorts by emphasizing quaint and special peculiarities. If the ideally simple characters of august poetry, bare human nature unfallen, uncursed, are like noble sculptures, these grotesquely simple persons are like caricatures, figures all teeth, all eyes, all neck. There are Japanese deformed figures, with atrociously long feet or fingers twisted up to form candlesticks; or Italian personal caricatures, in which a man with a long nose has a proboscis. Likewise in novels men may be caricatured, sketched in outline, their special features, particularly their oddities and weaknesses, selected and insisted upon. Thus Barkis, Squeers, Pecksniff, and a hundred more of Dickens's characters are made general,

vivid, and amusing above common life by the concentration, so to speak, of their life into a few channels. Some Pecksniff, or Weller, or Squeers diluted with much ordinary humanity had been observed by Dickens. He crystallizes the hypocrisy, the curious humour, the mean tyranny, from its solution. The character thus created is intenser than life;—more amusing and more energetic, because simpler. Such a method of creating character makes a book a comedy of what are called humours; that is, in which the personages are dominated by some trait or tendency and lose the normal proportions of humanity.

Simplification if carried to its extreme produces allegorical figures, the incarnation of abstract ideas, not imagined as living personalities, but willed or thought out as expressions of doctrine. Thus some characters appear in order to be absurdly jealous of the heroine, or to manifest a dreadful villainy from which her purity shall stand forth. This type of character is typical of the weaker aspect of romanticism. The characters in Dumas's *Three Musketeers,* as Milady and Buckingham, are thus mechanically simple; they are machines of the story, mere general terms or

blank checks, feminine villainy or the gallantry of a perfect gentleman, not persons. Thus it is generally with books meant to "teach a lesson," with the novels of Miss Yonge, for instance; though the didactic impulse does not, in the case of the genuine story-teller, avail to destroy his imaginative power. The example of George Eliot is interesting, whose works ran steadily drier of life and carried a larger burden of the sand of doctrine, as her life advanced.

Allegory is a waste of energy. If a symbol does no more than convey an idea, it is a vexation; it costs more and is less distinct than the direct communication of the idea. When once you have seen through the symbol, what value has it? If a novel teaches a lesson and no more, the lesson can be better and more clearly given as a lesson and without the novel. Only those symbols are tolerable in which the symbol and the idea are one, in which the meaning of the book cannot be really given apart from the whole book.

Those novelists who have most abounded in generalizations and been most fertile in doctrine, a class which includes most of our recent writers of distinction,—Mrs. Ward and Mr. Bennett and Mr. Wells, for example,—in so far

as they are novelists have not only made their ideas incarnate in complete personalities, but have something more to give than the doctrine they preach. Their characters suffer and do and we suffer and do with them; they move the human depths of nature, and not merely communicate what Wordsworth called "valooable truths." Even the greatest English allegorist, John Bunyan, owes his greatness not to his doctrine, but to his poetic nature. In very truth he apprehended his ideas as visions. His autobiography makes this fact plain in that tender and most touching vision of himself upon the hillside, beaten by the storm and striving to enter the peaceful precincts of the sunlit sheepfold which enclosed the poor women, true believers, to whose happiness he could not attain. The vision of the Den, the Way, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, of the Delectable Mountains was not determined upon or worked out by his rational mind or his conscious purpose, but was a fated impression governing him. He could not escape it, and had to write it down to lay its ghost, so to speak. If we compare with the obvious allegory of Bunyan the less boldly avowed allegory of a doctrinal novelist, for example of the

late E. P. Roe, we find illustrated the difference between the true imagination, though working in the balder literary form, and the mechanical allegorizing temper masquerading in the aspect of realism. Certain passages in *Barriers Burned Away* are really vivid; they are commonly those which deal with things observed or studied from records. But the whole "gives itself away." The rich and brilliant Miss Ludolph incarnates the best of unbelief; Dennis Fleet expresses Christian faith. She is endowed with every gift but faith and humility; but her life is hollow without them, and even her art is imperfect. Fleet is the perfect man, and necessarily a Christian. He is the Sir Charles Grandison of an inadequately educated and sincere Christianity forty years ago, to whom nice clothes, nice manners, and a nice time were almost as precious as the Gospel, who judged pictures by their sentimental story, and whose heart and mind were never rent by any agonizing question about social justice or the order of the world. The defect of this teaching is that so far as anything appears, just about the opposite is as possible as what the author declares to be true. For if the will of the novelist in composing his story is at the service of his

ideas of right and wrong, he can easily make the story come out as seems best to him. Fiction can be depended upon only for human truth grounded in human nature, and capable of being tested by fair-minded persons of extensive experience. It teaches by revealing what we see to be true from our own consciousness, and not by demonstration through evidence; and the reader has a just grievance when an author takes advantage of him to express a doctrine of expediency or experimental justice not grounded in the universal. One is always tempted to speculate whether the respectable Mr. Goodchild might not have failed in business, whether worldly success might not have been the reward, not of the Idle Apprentice's idleness surely, but of some of the selfishness, rough violence, and boldness, of the dice-playing rascal. When things turn out "right" too easily, the reader is perversely inclined to question even the useful truisms of daily life, and the moral effect is then the very opposite of what the writer intends. On the whole, then, the writer is bound to obey his vision, to strive to see his vision as clearly as he can, and by no means to make one up for himself.

Living things are single in their life and

organization, and at the same time complex in the phenomena of their life. They manifest life in a multitude of ways, but they manifest one life. So the art which comes nearest life has not a hard simplicity, a poor and definite singleness, but a blending of many things into one by the power of an energy from within. Thus it is with Fielding or with Thackeray. Their characters are of mingled qualities; they are compounded of many simples. Sophia Western is a charming girl, rosy and sweet, and *very* gracious and kind. But she can rail with thoroughgoing downrightness and a ready vocabulary which quite surprise us, considering how lamblike she has been, until we reflect that Squire Western's daughter must have heard and seen a great deal more than is set down in the book. Becky Sharp is keen and selfish and determined. She surprises herself and us by admiring her husband for the first time when his assertion of his own dignity causes him to overthrow at a stroke all her ingeniously based and carefully built up tower of hope; and what complexity of motives may have caused her to smash the image of George Osborne in Amelia's obstinate heart, by revealing his faithlessness?

In novels, then, which most characteristically and completely realize the ideal of this special kind of imagination, the modelling is very high, the details are full and complete, the gradations delicate. With the main figure, the light falls full on the brow and the temples, the subtle roundness of the forms of which is delicately studied; the droop of the weary eyelids is drawn with perfect precision; the curves about the mouth are traced with full elaborateness. The whole personage stands out boldly and solidly on his feet. But how about the rest of the picture? Imagine everything in it painted as delicately and with the same subtle completeness. The result would be the dryness and the confusion of a photograph, in which everything being reproduced with equal fidelity and fulness, nothing is presented with force. The emphasis, being everywhere, is nowhere. Some things must be less emphasized; there must be a background, in order to make a foreground. But the background figures ought to have an interest, a quality, of their own. How may this problem be solved? How may the background characters be made unemphatic without becoming uninteresting? They must be sketched; that is, their outlines alone must

be drawn, but with some exaggeration. As the leaves of a tree cannot every one be painted in a picture, though their type may be suggested by a certain emphasis of the effect they produce, so the background figures of a crowded book must be simplified, and some obvious detail in them must be emphasized, to make them contribute their part to the life of the whole without interfering with the total effect. So even those novelists who use the most full and balanced method of representing real and unexaggerated characters distort their minor persons. Miss Austen paints splendid and simple fools;—Mrs. Bennet, or Mr. Collins. Thackeray delights in picturesque eccentricities;—Foker or Costigan. Fielding gives diagrams for men;—Thwackum and Square.

In actual life men and women are not only complex but subject to change. We are modified by contact with the world; we develop by experience; if we are changed in no other way, we grow up, passing from infancy to manhood, from manhood on to old age and decline. We are not the same in sickness as in health. It is one aspect of the simplification of nature by art for its own purposes that the processes of change in human nature should be neglected,

and that characters should be represented as fixed, as static. Vividly to imagine one unusual and coherent personality is a distinguished achievement. "My Uncle Toby" by himself confers immortality on Sterne. To imagine not only one but many personalities interacting in social life; to imagine a society of people, is a stupendous act of power; it is the greatness of Dickens, or of Scott. Now if this group of people creates an interesting composite action, real to the imagination, and in a true sense one,—if the interest of plot and character is balanced,—one of the highest intellectual achievements possible for a writer is performed. Hence the still unsurpassed greatness of Fielding in English fiction and of Balzac in French. Now if we do not stop here, if we look not only for really imagined characters and a worthy plot, but demand that the characters shall be modified, shall while remaining consistent with themselves, while remaining in the highest sense one, fluctuate or progress,—the mind which can create a work combining all these elements of excellence may well seem to us superhuman. In point of fact, this even distribution of interested attention is not to be found. The evolution of plot as in itself inter-

esting is unfriendly to the interest in character. A complicated progression of incidents contends with a complicated progression of psychological development. Those types of writing in which uncommon achievement is the chief subject of the author's attention, the novels of Scott, or Stevenson, require unchanging characters in order to make their climaxes effective.

A step toward closeness to life is taken, and an advance in interest and complexity in the characters of a novel is manifested, when characters are conceived of as gradually exhibiting elements present in the germ from the first. Tom Jones, for example, is throughout the book which bears his name the same impulsively "good-hearted" fellow, full of weakness and prone to error, but uncomplainingly sweet-tempered and kindly intentioned. As a boy when he fights to save Sophia's bird he shows the same qualities and heedlessly causes himself to be misunderstood in the same way as when, grown to manhood, he befriends Black George, or brings Nightingale to do his duty by Nancy. His sensual, unregulated, kindly, lax, and ignoble manhood is really developed from his eager, heedless boyhood. He has not

changed in any fundamental way, but he has grown up. After he is married he may behave better, but he will not change.

A second and a more decided step is taken when the characters are conceived of as really changing, as really modified by experience. By this is not meant that in some points they act at the end of the story differently from the way in which they act at the beginnng, because now they know some facts of which they were ignorant then; but that in some points their motives have been changed, that the groundwork of their life is not what it was. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* do not really change in nature. They have learned to know each other and their own hearts better than at the beginning, but they are what they were. But Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede* is changed, though George Eliot is very timid about exaggerating the amount of his change. He is stabler, and graver, and kinder, as a result of his youthful sin and sorrow. Tito Melema in *Romola* goes from one act of self-indulgence to another, takes always the way of apparent ease, and at the end of the narrative is capable of infamy from which he would have recoiled, of which he could not have

dreamed, at the beginning. These two illustrations exhibit the limitations of George Eliot's treatment of change in character. She is entirely concerned with the growth or decadence of moral strength; and her art still has something of mere development, of mere evolution of tendencies already existent. Arthur learns to think of others and to consider the remote results of his deeds; Tito habitually thinks of his own skin, and shirks thinking about the consequences; Arthur is from the first essentially respectable, and Tito is from the first a good deal of a rascal. George Eliot's conception of character development is, therefore, somewhat timid and narrow. A more developed realism recognizes change as the most characteristic fact of human nature; change is response, and response is the sign of life. Thus fluctuation and modification in the characters is an element in the complex and stimulating art of Thomas Hardy, of George Meredith, as of Arnold Bennett and of H. G. Wells, of Tolstoy, or Gorky, or Barrès. All the most notable recent writers are at one in this, however much they may differ in everything else. Arthur Pendennis is by no means a fixed personality; but compare him with Clay-

hanger. How much more the plasticity of the latter is made a force in the book. Compare the two sisters in *The Old Wives' Tale* with Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*. Compare the Brothers Karamazov with the two Bedes. In all cases, though the later writer may not imagine the characters more vividly or even more truthfully than the earlier, he sees them in a new way; with the advance in realism has come the conception of unity in progress, of change without contradiction. Here as elsewhere, the philosophy of evolution reconciles the idea of guiding tendencies with richness of varying detail.

CHAPTER V

TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Most people apply the name of tragedy to any very sad or shocking or painful event, especially one which has resulted in death. In the newspapers, not only a suicide, and a murder, but a street-car collision and even an accidental fall on the sidewalk may be called tragedies. Tragedy is thought of as that which causes grief, especially grief over death, and comedy as that which causes laughter,—laughter however excited. But there are more than one kind of grief; there are many kinds of laughter—almost as many as there are kinds of men; and some compositions make us weep and laugh both at once. Deaths, too, impress us differently: consider the death of Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities,* that of Hypatia, that of Tito Melema, and that of Jehan Frollo in *Notre Dame de Paris.* Surely these are not all tragedies.

Tragedy, in the view here maintained, is a name for a kind of composition expressing a

certain special temper and mood; and this mood is more concerned with the characters than with the plot. Plot and character are not in general wholly separate creations. Some stories of a brilliant and exciting plot require mechanically definite characters of extreme wickedness or purity. But generally speaking, in natural and healthy stories the tone and spirit of the composition are given by the characters; the plots are such as fit the characters. And a tragic plot is that which fits the tragic character.

What, then, are tragic characters? Aristotle affirms that they are "better" than the average of humanity, by which interpreters agree that he means more highly endowed, with greater minds, more splendid ideals, and above all more energetic wills than belong to most men. Such brilliant beings—human though above common humanity—are the heroes and heroines of Greek tragedy: Agamemnon, Œdipus, or Iphigenia. Professor A. C. Bradley has almost the same thing to say of Shakespeare's tragic heroes; they are "exceptional" beings; Hamlet with his fineness of nature and speculative largeness of mind, Macbeth with his ecstasy of poetic vision, Lear with his hungrily affec-

tionate heart and his impulsive power of leadership, even Shylock, with his capacity for grand wrath, are all "exceptional" natures. The "betterness" or "exceptionality" of these ill-starred noble beings is not in the moral propriety of their behaviour, which may be sinful, but in their great possibilities for good or evil, and especially in the impression they produce that from them some of the inhibitions or restrictions which thwart the full development of the ordinary man have been taken away. Commonly they will more ardently and more definitely than ordinary men, or if not they see life with strange detached clearness.

Are the heroes and heroines of tragic novels thus raised above the commonplace? The novel has its walk within the bounds of daily reality; can it give scope to these "better," these "exceptional" beings of tragedy? To answer we need but to consider some of the great tragic prose fiction of the world. In the earliest of tragic novels, *Clarissa Harlowe,* Clarissa stands before us as a being radiant in the darkness, and pure in the midst of corruption. The author conceives of her as not only beautiful, graceful, and charming, as not only endowed in no common measure with every

womanly virtue, but as intellectually superior to the average alike of men and women, and as possessed of executive talent remarkable in any one, and especially in one so young. If she seems not to possess the will of initiative, she has the will of fortitude, and the dignity of unbroken courage and self-respect. In spite of her conventionality, even her commonplaceness of ideas, she is a heroine, a being above the level of ordinary humanity, pure, sweet, tender, and noble. Like her, all the women of George Eliot's tragic novels are superior beings. Romola and Janet and Maggie Tulliver are all endowed with uncommon intellectual talents, moral force, and energy of will; and all are in point of fact brought to distress if not to calamity as the direct results of these fatal gifts. It is the same with that gracious figure of enthusiastic youth, Richard Feverel, and with the large-natured Tess, with Anna Karenina, and with the peasant Büttner. All are personalities of force or beauty or grace or insight, who stand above the plain level of humanity, and whose fate touches us with a dread of the mystery in the world, because being noble they are therefore unfortunate.

The secret of their misfortune is that by the very necessity of the case their very largeness of nature makes demands upon life above the ordinary and therefore the less likely to be gratified. The world that is has a little play, is a little crazy in every joint, and every being in it is not quite fitted to all the rest; and as the world is constantly changing, no man is fitted to it today, though he fitted it yesterday; and everything in the world is perpetually being adjusted anew. Indeed the interest of the world is in its maladjustment; a fixed and proper world with every creature entirely at ease in it would have nothing more to live for. It is the getting better of things that is exhilarating, the possible getting worse that is exciting. In this maladjusted world, the persons of greatest meaning are not those who fit it most perfectly, but may well be those who themselves ill adjusted to the world of the moment serve even by their sorrows to move the world to a new and better state, or may even be those who shake and test the order of the world by their crimes. Of the "better" of these beings the lot may be martyrdom, more or less complete; or it may be that the great sinners among them even by receiving due

punishment shock and startle rulers, and are by their lives and deaths forces in the world. Many or most cannot be at one with themselves or in all aspects equally powerful; and in human probability this crevice in their armour, this rift in the lute, may cause or may palliate their destruction. Hence the view of Aristotle, since his day much elaborated, that the tragic hero must be "better" than ordinary, must be on the whole deserving of approbation, but must have some flaw, some failing or defect within his nature, since misfortune befalling the wholly evil man will not be tragic, but merely satisfactory to the sense of justice, while the misfortune of the wholly good will disgust us, and provoke us to the thought that the government of the world is unrighteous. Accordingly many writers strive to reveal in Shakespeare's characters some weakness that brings each to destruction, however noble the character as a whole. Lear's impulsive petulance, Othello's credulity, Hamlet's hesitation are, in the view of these critics, each the flaw of a noble nature, a nature exposed to a stress too great to be endured by even these slight imperfections.

In such speculations, plausible though they

are, there is something mechanical, and indeed essentially false. It is not true that the tragic hero must be "on the whole good." *Macbeth* is certainly a great tragedy, and neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth is "on the whole good," or "more good than bad." It is true that neither is entirely or mechanically wicked. They went wrong, but they might conceivably have gone very nobly right. *Richard III,* on the other hand, is not a tragedy but a tale of horror, a tale of dreadful deeds done by a man who is too inflexibly wicked for the tragic effect. The defect of King Richard as a tragic hero is not that he is too wicked for the part, but that he is fixedly malevolent, mechanically evil. The tragic nature is a great nature with which normal men can sympathize, though they do not approve of it; not a mechanism but a living character; a human being conceivably different from what he actually is, conceivably adjusted to happier conditions than those which he has met. A great and unchangeably wicked man fascinates us, but touches us with neither fear nor pity. On the other hand, it is not necessarily the case that a tragic nature should be in some way flawed or weakened so that its fall is a result of its defects. Antigone, as

Professor Butcher points out, is without a flaw, in any intelligible sense relating to her destruction. Her calamitous end is not due to her fault or flaw, but to the fault of circumstances; she tests the world, not the world her. Is not the fate of martyrs tragic? "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: . . . of whom the world was not worthy . . ."

It is a narrow criticism that finds the calamity of Othello to have been induced by any defect of his or Desdemona's. Indeed, if he had been shrewder he would not have been deceived, but if he had been shrewder, he would not have been so noble. The defect is not in Othello, but in the conditions round him; in the puzzling state of the world; in universal weakness. The "pity of it" is the pity of the human lot.

George Eliot, in an interesting memorandum, tells of the ideas underlying her poem of *The Spanish Gypsy*. She had been looking at an Annunciation attributed to Titian, and it had occurred to her that here was a new and great dramatic motive. "A young maiden, believing herself to be on the eve of the great event of her life—marriage—about to share the or-

dinary lot of womanhood, full of young hope, has suddenly announced to her that she is chosen to fulfil a great destiny, entailing a terribly different destiny from that of ordinary womanhood. She is chosen, not by any momentary arbitrariness, but as a result of foregoing hereditary conditions: she obeys. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' Here, I thought, is a subject grander than that of Iphigenia, and it has never been used. I came home with this in my mind, meaning to give the motive a clothing in some suitable set of historical and local conditions. . . . The subject had become more and more pregnant to me. I saw it might be taken as the symbol of the part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions in the largest sense, and of the fact that what we call duty is entirely made up of such conditions; for even in cases of just antagonism to the narrow view of hereditary claims, the whole background of the particular struggle is made up of our inherited nature. Suppose for a moment that our conduct at great epochs was determined entirely by reflection, without the immediate intervention of feeling which supersedes reflection, our determination as to the right would

consist in an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot, partly as to our natural constitution, partly as sharers of life with our fellow-beings. Tragedy consists in the terrible difficulty of this adjustment,—

> ' The dire strife
> Of poor Humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.'

Looking at individual lots, I seemed to see in each the same story, wrought out with more or less of tragedy, and I determined the elements of my drama under the influence of these ideas."

No one today would think, as George Eliot does, of the double "claim" upon us as due to conflicting forms of heredity, or would be likely to find so stiff and technical a form of expression for these ideas as she does; but does she not shadow forth, though obscurely, the deepest truth of this whole matter? Is it not true that all lives are in some degree unfulfilled because of an imperfect adjustment not only of every human being to circumstance, to "environment," but of circumstances to each other, of

the environment to itself;—is it not true that "all creation groaneth and travaileth together"? The sense of daunting cosmic mystery broods round us, but with it is present the sense that evil is alien to the universe, that there is going on a perpetual painful re-creation toward a more perfect world, so that the mind is not cast into blank despair by the failure of the good, or by the inherent imperfection of the universe in which we are a part.

The elder tragedy—the tragedy before the novel—is in the main aristocratic. As the Monk says in Chaucer:

> " Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie,
> Of him that stood in greet prosperite,
> And is y-fallen out of heigh degree
> Into miserie and endeth wrecchedly."

The Greek heroes are the children of gods: human, indeed, and subject to pain and grief and death, but by virtue of their superhuman origin more beautiful and stronger and wiser than common men. Above all they are in some degree free from the restrictions which hem in the will of common men, and may

express the force of their mighty characters—our characters written in bolder hieroglyphics—more freely than we can manifest the tendency of our natures. Just so their calamities are the more inevitable and the more tremendous. Their ancestry in its greatness carries a curse. Shakespeare's heroes are kings and princes, and in their lives, like the Greek heroes, may act out the more freely the full energy of their natures,—may more adequately than common men exhibit the intensity of their ambition, pride, or vengefulness, as well as of their magnificence, their tenderness, their powers of thought and action, matured in the full sunshine of worldly glory, and developed by their activity in great affairs. Even in his comedy, his respectable characters are at least merchant princes or "ladies richly left." The very exaltation of the heroes of the elder stage, Greek, English, or French, makes the contrast the more intense when their downfall comes. And as the effect of the contrast is increased by raising the hero in his day of prosperity to the highest point humanly attainable, to a place among the children of the immortals, or among the princes of the world; so it is increased by bringing him in his fall down to

the very limit of human dread, namely to death itself; to death, the sharpest contrast and the most impressive event and the most definite conclusion in human experience. The men of old times knew death and death by violence familiarly as a present and continuous danger, and they intensely feared and hated the dread mystery, for if they had not they could not have continued.

In our day the democratic constitution of society and a life of normal security, in which war is the horrible exception, have made natural another type of tragedy; a tragedy of less violence of outward contrast between its height and its depth, taking its heroes from ranks below the highest, and ending not always in death, but it may be in pain, or even in moral degeneration. Clarissa and Tess and Anna Karenina die, and must die; they had a right to die. Maggie Tulliver also dies, but without right or reason. Hetty Sorrel ought to have died. Romola lives, and ought to live. It is not death in any of these novels which constitutes their tragedy; it is the sense of mystery and largeness and terror. The novel of *Romola* is a tragedy not because Savonarola and Tito die, but because Tito is not fit to live,

and because Romola's life is not fit for her; because the beauty of his nature wastes and degenerates and because the nobility of her nature leads to no end worthy of itself. In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,* the tragedy is not alone that Lucy dies, but that Richard lives on, the mere shell of a man. The tragic depth of martyrdom is that "the world is not worthy." Nor can we deny to such conceptions the noble name of tragedy, provided the work embodying them creates the impression of a conflict, a necessary conflict, between a sincere nature and a universe to which it not only is not but cannot be adjusted, of a situation from which there is no true way out.

Pity for the helpless is not the same with that sterner sense of sympathetic pity combined with terror evoked by the unsuccessful struggle of superior natures against fate which is the tragic feeling in the purest sense. As we have drawn one illustration from *Paradise Lost* so we may consider another. With the archangel fallen human nature cannot but sympathize. We men, imprisoned and baffled, but eager and desirous, cannot but feel the greatness of his pain, and be struck with awe by his

majesty, though dimmed and tarnished. But our first parents,—beautiful, tender beings, helpless and naked, the sport of forces invisible and unintelligible to themselves, and playing innocently in their enclosed garden, which was not so fortified against surprise but that the enemy could enter,—these figures, symbols of the experience of every human soul, how appealing they are in their weakness! The novel abounds in examples of this gentle type: natures made to be played upon and destroyed unconscious, to be carried along with the downward rush of the forceful characters, the personages of will, or to be beaten on the rocks of an ocean too stormy for their strength. Such are Elgiva in *A Pair of Blue Eyes;* and with many such Dickens makes his appeal to us—Tom Pinch, the childish David Copperfield, and a multitude more of helpless children. Next after Dickens's humour, his most interesting contribution to the human temper is the sense of the individuality of children, their claims to an independent life of the soul, the horror of exposing these tender beings to the rough cruelty of ignorance, or to perversion, or to the tyranny of mean natures, or to the strife and pain which should be reserved

for adult strength. Dickens set the example of the novel of pity.

Pity, though not a modern invention, has been felt more and more intensely and more and more widely in the history of humanity. It is one important force in what we call the advance of civilization, that is, in the impulse to increased co-operation, in the art of living together in communities. It is the source of laws protecting women and children; of hospitals; of the care of the defective as a social duty; of the consideration that not only strength and happiness but weakness and helplessness create a claim upon society.

The spirit of pity has created a new kind of imaginative composition, the work especially of the great Russian writers who have expressed themselves in the novel. The flame of pity did not burn unmingled in Dickens. His sentiment clouds the flame, his humour overwhelms it. In Dostoevsky and Tolstoy the sense of pity reaches a gravity and largeness which makes it sublime in its way. This is not the way of that which has been called tragedy in this book. But the cosmic tenderness of the profound scenes of *The Brothers Karamazov* is not only melting to the soul,

but enlarging to it. In this work the world possesses the poetry of the

> " confederate storm
> Of sorrow barricadoed evermore
> Within the walls of cities "

which the soul of Wordsworth saw looming but indistinct. The world has lost because Wordsworth did not turn upon the griefs which men suffer in the complexities of modern life the power of his brooding imagination, but retreated from contemplating them. He had proclaimed himself a

> " happy man,
> And therefore bold to look on sterner things; "

but his strength was not sufficient for the arduous vision, and he "put it by."

The beauty and power of the two high and deep forms of imaginative composition which deal with the sorrows of mankind, tragedy and pathos, may suffer substitution or imitation in three ways: by unsound terror,—melodrama; unsound pity,—sentimentality; or false terror and pity,—perversion.

Tragedy, resting upon characters of will, produces deeds of dread created by struggles

from within. Suppose the deeds without the souls; marvellous acts performed by beings all of a piece, cast in a mould, incapable of change and wholly pure with a superhuman gleam, or wholly evil with demoniac consistency. Such are the narratives of Bulwer-Lytton; such are *The Count of Monte Cristo,* and *The Three Musketeers.* In works like these, melodramas, the tragic deed is performed without the tragic nature, or the tragic spirit. To mark them as inferior to tragedy is not to condemn them: such works when consistent with themselves and frankly unreal are immense fun. It is the intrusion of the melodramatic spirit in disguise, or where it has no right to be, in opposition to the spirit of the work that destroys inner consistency, and so sins against the fundamental laws of the imagination. All that has to do with Godfrey Cass in *Silas Marner* is melodramatic; unreal, mechanical, excessive. So is Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield,* a mechanism; so seems to me in spite of myself Lovelace in *Clarissa Harlowe.* Externally brilliant and at times even deceiving, they have no inward fluctuation or evolution, reach no determining crisis, but are fixed from the first, —"fixed as in a frost." Their natures are not

tragic, for the tragic being impresses us as capable of having done other than it does, as open to change and growth, as in general rebellious and energetic and modifiable. The great bad men of tragedy might have been great good men; its good men might have fallen. They present the power of conquest, of victory, of unity in tension and struggle, not in quiescence.

The sentimental, likewise, is the unjustified or externally conceived pathetic. And the lack of justification consists primarily in the fact that the feeling is willed;—the great fault of writers who either resolving to have an emotion or to produce an effect, or else exaggerating their own genuine feelings, sometimes contradict and sometimes go beyond nature. It would be too much to say that such sentiment is wholly insincere, but it is essentially false. Dickens thus excites and overloads his own natural gift of pity; and his Little Pauls justify the reserves with which his mighty genius must be regarded.

But it is not alone the external and unimagined pity which we call sentimental. It is that sense of sadness which is felt too easily. In this as in every other aspect of art it is not

alone the force of feeling that is contagious, but the force of a feeling that has prevailed over a strong resisting power,—which has reduced to itself a whole strong nature, and thus created the poise in tension, the unity of a controlling energy, which is the source of high artistic delight. Easy terror and easy tears are mere weakness. The fountain of tears must be found in strange regions, or must break forth from the rocks. The vision of life must be profound and the terrors of life must be serious to command the imagination.

The perversions of tragedy and pathos do a deeper violence to the realities of human relationships. All serious arts manifest symptoms of decadence when those who follow them try to create the effect of combined surprise and naturalness by paradox, especially by the creation of moral paradoxes in the nature of their heroes. Coleridge says well in his praise of Shakespeare, "He is in the highroad of life. He has no pure adulterers or tender-hearted murderers." As it is a manifestation of his superior genius that he has power to reveal the strangeness of normal humanity, so it is an implicit confession of lesser creative force to depend upon the excitement of abnormality as

the source of interest. The typical "romantic" hero wears sin as a crown or halo on his brow. He is not merely wicked, but curiously, nobly, or refinedly wicked. The list of these subtly blended spirits, the *bouquet* of whose moral natures is compounded of elements which are separately offensive, but which combined give a rare pleasure to the connoisseur, is a long one. There are Rousseau's virtuous seducer, and Mrs. Radcliffe's mysteriously impressive bandits and inquisitors (ancestors of the Byronic hero). Even Scott's healthy but insensitive nature made a crude demand for paradox by making his "rogue his hero," from the "mean forger," Marmion, to the generous thief, Rob Roy. The same ideal is maintained by Bulwer and Dostoevsky. The heroes of these writers hover perilously between the comic and the disgustful. On the one hand,—

> "When the enterprising burglar isn't burgling,
> And the cut-throat isn't occupied in crime,
> He loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling,
> And listen to the merry village chime."

On the other hand, from beneath the fragrance, —the exotic fragrance of a special refinement, or the plainer cologne-water of a very tender

sensibility,—one catches odours of the beast or of the sty.

The romantic paradox of interesting sin arises commonly from the attempt to build a tragedy upon the mere unfulfilled desire of an individual, from subordinating the large, the typical, from belittling the law and the universal. But even the pathos of transitoriness depends upon being set against a background of permanence; and the spirit of tragedy is cosmic. When Bulwer strove to make consistent and sympathetic Eugene Aram, the tender-hearted murderer, he at least left the extent of his guilt in doubt, and blasted the heart which strove to live apart in intellectual loneliness. Dostoevsky has with bolder and more powerful genius followed in his steps, creating an order of society which is impossible—which would split asunder. No doubt it is easy to believe—it is impossible not to believe—in the corruption of noble natures by social wrong. No doubt there are benevolent murderers, pure harlots, drunkards who are gentlemen at heart—mad folk, poor things, most of them—but that the benevolent murderer, the pure harlot, the essentially high-hearted drunkard who has robbed his wife,

should meet all casually in the same evening, almost at the same table, and that incidentally all the respectable people in the world of the novel should be shadows or hypocrites or idiots or machines;—the result is not pathos but vertigo. A society like that could not be, and if a miracle created it for an instant, it would explode the next. *Crime and Punishment* has the nightmare unreality of a thing every part of which is plausible, but the parts of which destroy the whole. Fantastic though it be, *The Brothers Karamazov* has more truth, because it exhibits more contrast and manifests in the characters more rational strivings.

D'Annunzio's heroes are grown-up spoiled children who with the petulance of satiation must smash their superabundance of toys. Having assiduously cultivated what Plato calls the sickly part of their souls, they swell, like his tyrant's son, into riot if aught be denied them or if all be granted them. Such natures are unworthy of the augustness of death, in which they voluptuously delight; they are too soft for it. There is a way out for them in the mere external discipline of the jail or the machine shop; or they may be purged in the flame of war.

The unreflecting view of tragedy and comedy simply opposes them, one as concerned with imaginations of pleasure, one with those of pain. But a brief consideration shows that the experiences which create comedy and those which create tragedy are not opposed but akin, or even identical; and that the opposition between tragedy and comedy depends upon the point of view; upon something in the mind, not in the things. The tragic spirit arises from a sense of maladjustment; but is it not plain that the comic spirit also depends upon the recognition of a maladjustment, an incongruity? Mr. John Kendrick Bangs in his lecture on humour told a story too poignant to be endured of a comic drunken woman in London exchanging speeches of high-flavoured wit with the police. Seeing a child watching her with a timid unhappy face he essayed to comfort her, saying, "Don't be afraid; she won't hurt you."

"I know it," was the answer; "she is my mother."

The woman, comic to the police and to the thoughtless spectator, was tragic to the child and the thoughtful spectator.

Humour, then, resides not alone in the incongruity, but in the perception of the incon-

gruity. A jest is made not only by the jester but by the listener. It exists as a result of the way in which it is seen and taken; it is created by being enjoyed. And the kind of joke a man enjoys depends on him: on his age, his health, his experience, his education, his race, his religion, his politics, his philosophy. Thus there is much more diversity of types of humour than of tragedy, and much less general agreement upon what is genuinely humorous. Every nation has its humour: the English tending to be dependent on the situation, genial and often mingled with pathos, the French concerned with social types, intellectual and satiric, the German broadly good-natured, the American verbal and full of exaggeration. Proverbially every nation is likely to be unintelligent and unsympathetic towards the humour of other nations. Americans are obtuse to the humour of *Punch,* Englishmen are obtuse to American jokes, Scotchmen to English jokes. Nothing is more national than a comic paper; *Punch* and *Fliegende Blaetter* and *Life* and *Le Rire.* Some people are made very sad by the jests which tickle their friends. Puns, parodies, horseplay, or tavern tales which throw some people into fits of laughter make others wince

or look down their noses. Some people are simply puzzled by Sam Weller or shocked by Falstaff. In brief, humour is a complex, individual thing; the sources of the greater pains of mankind are alike; the sources of their laughter differ. Great tragedies appeal to all succeeding generations. They spring from emotions essentially the same in their source and their nature for all people. In few aspects of art is there progress, but there is progress in humour.

The feeling of amusement, whatever else is to be said about it, is roused by the perception of an incongruity, by some violation of rational order, which we in no way fear, and in which our sympathies are on the winning side. People are amused, for instance, by the incongruity of the actual fact with the normal fact. In the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance princes had dwarfs at court to amuse them. Now a dwarf is incongruous with our conception of the normal man, he is an unsuccessful attempt at a man; and we laugh at him if we do not sympathize with him but with the successful example, and are not afraid of him. So a man with a large nose or crooked teeth or a limp is amusing because his appearance is incongruous with normal human proportions; he "looks

funny." My friends would laugh if I should make an extraordinarily fine shot at billiards. It would be abnormal, but they would not be afraid it would happen again. Characters, likewise, that are eccentric or disproportioned, having in excess some normal quality, like the love of money or self-esteem or the desire of praise, are subjects of comedy. Such are the themes often of Dickens, or occasionally of Meredith. The mere fatness and sleepiness of the fat boy are funny; Sir Austin Feverel's orderliness, Sir Willoughby's regard for himself are funny, just because they are abnormal and we do not sympathize. But as soon as we see that we do well to fear these things they cease to be funny; and they may be portentous enough to be tragic.

Amusement is excited by incongruity between that which is and that which is wished. A boy sticks a beetle on a pin or holds a cat by the tail; he laughs and laughs at their futile efforts to escape. It is not alone their pain, but much more the contrast between their will and their power which is amusing. A golf player slices; he is funny because he does something different from what he wishes to do. Any failure is funny to one who does not sym-

pathize with the man who fails. Even every tragedy has a conceivably comic side. Macbeth was a joke to the witches; Othello to Iago; the blinded Gloucester to Regan. If the king did not fear Hamlet he would laugh at him. These are horrible jests; this is the laughter of fiends. But the examples test our principle fairly; there is an element of the comic when we perceive an incongruity, a contrast between some rule and some exception, and sympathize with the winning side.

There is comedy in an incongruity between the fact and belief; a credulous David Simple, who believes every tall story, a vain John Crosbie, who believes himself cleverer or more beautiful or better than he is, an egoist, a Willoughby Patterne who believes himself cosmically more important than he is,—are all favourite objects of ridicule. The incongruity between fact and pretence,—Pecksniff's hypocrisy, Scapin's deceit,—are comic. These human incongruities in character and act are the perennial sources of satire; Fielding goes so far as to say that hypocrisy is the sole proper object of satire, and Meredith sets his imps dancing about the figure of self-importance however disguised.

Incongruity between the literal and the actual meaning of words is comic. Exaggeration,—a harmless exaggeration, not intended to deceive,—is the "note" of American humour: a gas bill like Butterworth's, of 1,500,000 feet, being 500,000 feet more than the total amount of gas made at the works during the month, or the warning to keep seed wheat dry, for fear a grain should swell too big to go into a bag. All the incongruities of language are rich in merriment, the unconscious ones of unforced delight, the intended ones of a humour that always risks thinness, and smartness. The Irish bull (of theory; the "bull" of reality is likely to be an effort of intentional wit too subtle or too happy for the listener), the mixed metaphor, "Baboo English" and other incongruities of tone all make the listener happy. Parodies and mock-heroic poems amuse him with a tang of bitterness or contempt, or at least of condescension. Thinnest and coldest of humour is the mechanical play upon words manufactured commercially as "filler" for the newspapers, in which the workman, running through the dictionary for two words that sound alike, painfully erects a joke upon them. "Gentle Dulness ever loves a joke."

The types of humour, then, are infinite in number; and the list which has been given has as its object to illustrate the scope of the principle that a sense of amusement is created whenever an incongruity is perceived, in which our sympathies are on the winning side.

The incongruous is the irrational. The spirit of fun creates irrationality simply for pleasure. The spirit of comedy in general detects irrationality; it is essentially critical. Generally speaking, the humourist perceives a fault or abnormality and does not approve it. He may regard himself as a superior being looking down on a weakness which he does not share, or may be a companion, not lifted above his neighbour, but open-eyed to an imperfection which, or the like of which, he may himself find in his own nature. Of the despiser of comic exceptions the savage is the simplest type. The savage has the contempt of ignorance; he is amused by everything new of which he is not afraid. The African savages of whom the psychologist Sully wrote went into paroxysms of laughter whenever they heard the click of a camera. The thing was not conventional, it "wasn't done" in African polite circles. And it was not terrible.

The man of little training laughs like the savage, in ignorance. That which is new to him is comic. The styles of 1847, of 1890, of 1900, of 1916, are absurd in 1915. The styles of three months hence are absurd when they first appear. Villagers laugh at foreigners. The inhabitants of the city of Washington, who see many kinds of costumes on foreign diplomats, accept them all. In most towns a turban or a fez or a horsehair hat with a sugarloaf crown and a flat brim would gather a mocking crowd.

Not only ignorance but consciously superior intelligence may laugh in scorn. The prophet Isaiah ridicules the idolatrous carpenter who buys a log of wood, saws it in two, makes firewood of one end, and a god of the other. With one end he warms himself and saith, "Aha, I have seen the fire," and to the other he bows down. Milton is more ferociously scornful at the expense of the amateur acting of the young theological postulants, "writhing and unboning their clergy limbs to all the antic gestures of Trinculos, bawds, and buffoons." Swift, who had an extraordinary practical intelligence and an enthusiasm for social good, and who saw clearly the stupidity by which mankind is governed, was tortured by it. How easy with a

little good sense and a trifle of good will to create prosperity in Ireland, or to establish justice in England; but how men insist on being fools, and such base fools! So he lashes the folly of the dirty race with his fearful scorn. "It is no loss of honour to be overcome by the lion, but who with the figure of a man would submit to be devoured alive by a rat?"

Other humourists are cruel. Hate the thought as we may, we must recognize in unregenerate man a delight in triumphing over the pain of others; and in some writers there is a joy over the torture they imagine, as a cruel boy is gleeful over his wretched insect or unlucky cat. Professor Woodberry attributes such cruelty to the humour of Poe. He regards him as gloating over Fortunato, or the man in *The Pit and the Pendulum.*

The teacher's humour is from above down, like Addison, condescending to women, and instructing them as "inferior beings, unworthy of the Latin grammar," about the rational conduct of life. Or like Pope, gently informing the half-educated average man that

> " A little knowledge is a dangerous thing;
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; "

or putting the thoughtless majority in the proper frame of mind:

> "In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
> One truth is clear: whatever is, is right."

I suppose Pope and Addison are vexatious because they are so wholly sure of themselves, and so blandly benevolent to ordinary fools like us. As the tragedy of those writers who do not in their own natures intensely suffer the pains of man is an outward thing, a melodrama, so the humour of those who do not in their own natures take to themselves the follies of man is cold and external, a lesson and no joy.

The humourist, then, may look from level ground at the incongruities which he perceives in men. That is, he may be well aware of the irrationality in that which amuses him, and at the same time he may be as well aware that he is himself as irrational, if not about this matter, then about something else. He is in judgment on the "winning" side, the rule, but in spirit he sympathizes with the exception. So arises a mixture of feelings, a mingling of amusement and tenderness, which disarms and loosens and penetrates the nature strangely. This is our sentiment about Don Quixote. He

is below humanity, actually a monomaniac, an absurd monomaniac, ridiculous, contemptible if one could despise him. Yet he is loved, not only by all the people in the book, but by all those who have read it since; by a kind of miracle he wins respect and almost worship as a saint. Cervantes would have been surprised and the Don would have uttered one of his richest addresses to Sancho Panza if he could have anticipated his posthumous glory as the incarnation of the unconquerable ideal.

It is in these figures, at once ridiculous and beloved, that the novel, especially the older English novel, is particularly rich. Parson Adams, the Vicar of Wakefield, Matthew Bramble, Uncle Toby, Colonel Newcome, the Baron of Bradwardine and many more of Scott's characters, Mr. Pickwick and a cherubic host of Dickens's creation are personages who find their fit abiding place in the somewhat capricious world of the loosely ordered epic novel of the earlier English writers. The novel of tragedy, of analysis, or of mere romantic doing has no place for such characters. They require a spacious atmosphere, a wide-extended scene, clear sunlight, and healthy activity; not half lights, the microscope, the inner life, or

the demands of the individual on the universe. Never at home in France, where the genial type of humour is one of sheer fun, like Tartarin, they do not exist in the novels of Russia or Italy or Germany. Not even in Spain has the genial inspiration of the "hidalgo, old and poor," been felt as it has in England.

The all-embracing humour, which is a serene philosophy in itself, is beyond the reach of most writers. With the growth of a stricter sense of cause and effect, of a severer idea of form, of a sadder if not a sterner philosophy, the beloved absurdities have disappeared from the novel. Only the geniuses most richly endowed with imaginative sympathy and with intellectual objectivity can attain to that large and free type. Most humourists are the servants of their rationality—they feel obliged to condemn and prefer ways of living, they take sides in sympathy against the objects of their ridicule. So Meredith, in his essay on *Comedy and the Comic Spirit,* conceives of comedy solely as criticism on human aberrations from sound reason, especially on those which result from the subtle infections of Self. He writes a novel as a satire on Egoism. His clear sense of his own point of view betrays him; he becomes a

partisan,—a man touched with the absurdity of the superior person,—and the bells of folly jingle round his own unconscious head as he belabours with pedantic thoroughness the dusty jacket he has put upon his man of straw, Sir Willoughby Patterne. Like his is most of the humour of the later English novel—its purpose corrective satire, and its source the superior man's perception of the irrationalities of the society round him. Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Wells have doctrines as to the social order and as to personal ethics, which they promulgate by the means of critical humour. One is blandly aloof, and remarks the absurdities of the conservative spirit with a pitying condescension; the other with more insistence and scorn reveals the pettiness of big business and the hypocrisy of the conventional policing of life. Neither smiles in love. Thus the more recent English novel is less great than the elder, because it is more doctrinal and narrower in its humour.

As the highest order of humour is manifested by an all-inclusive and sympathetic spirit, and a detachment from direct partisanship, so the highest order of pathos is manifested likewise. The noblest pity is aroused not by the dark

mysteries of humanity, but by its profound pitiableness—a pitiableness found everywhere, in the virtuous and the sinful, in the prosperous as well as in the unfortunate. And men are thus moved with compassion not as superiors, but as sharers in the common lot, as on the same plane with all others. Moreover, this pity, so far as it is tainted with doctrinalism is weakened and made narrow—degenerates to sentimentality, evangelical, or Russian Orthodox, or quietistic, or what not. It is when it is free, when quite objective, when it is a play of the nature, a temper, not a means of persuasion, that it remains noble. Thus the spirit of humour, the spirit of pity, and the spirit of tragedy all reach their highest artistic power when applied in their utmost scope, when applied to man, tragic in the disappointment of his highest aspiration, which is not therefore futile, pathetic in the weakness of his greatest strength, which is not therefore fruitless, ridiculous in the smallness of his grandest achievements, which are not therefore trivial.

One of the chief functions of literature is to extend the limits of sympathy by reducing one field of life and nature after another to the service of the imagination. Here the novel has

done the work of the pioneer. Beauty is found lurking where only ugliness was before perceived: in the ocean, the mountain, the desert; in the life-weary face and work-worn hand. Tragic sympathy has spread out from the demigod over all mankind; it takes in the frontiersman and the people of mean streets; it takes in even the bald citizen in broadcloth, and the labourer. Pity, which on Homer's page falls like a ray of Autumn sunshine on the captive, the child, the poor widow, the youth dying in his beauty, gives to us all a humble intelligence of every other heart, for—

> "He who feels contempt
> For any living thing, hath faculties
> Which he has never used."

Above all, the novel has taught us to smile well and wisely. It has made the laugh of scorn and vanity itself absurd. It has even taken us past the comedy of the existing external order—

> "Art made tongue-tied by authority,
> And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill;—"

to the temper, say, of Montaigne, who recognizes that healthy humanity is but a compound

of sickly qualities, in approximate and unstable balance. The shining vanities and flaming ambitions of youth settling into contented (or discontented) baldness, and the measuring of tape, the humiliation that Goethe remarks upon, of being twice in love,—these are its objects. First is the comicality of the hunchback or the dwarf, then the ridiculousness of the clothed animal, then the lovable absurdity of the forked radish itself.

CHAPTER VI

SETTING

Two of the essential elements of a narrative, fable and character, have been discussed. There remains the third, the setting. The setting includes all the circumstances, material and immaterial, which surround the action and determine the conditions under which it takes place. Such are, for example, time and place, as in the fourteenth century, in Lapland; the social group or groups to which the personages belong, as commercial travellers, or cowboys, or the smart set, or backwoodsmen; the current of ideas with which the narrative is conversant, as quietistic philosophy, or educational reform, or conservative politics;—in brief all that makes up the medium in which the action is carried on. Like the two elements of the narrative already discussed, the setting may be the writer's main interest. Thus in *Waverley,* it is not so much the adventures of Waverley in which Sir Walter Scott is interested as the contrast between Highland and Lowland life,

and the romantic spirit of a bygone age. And in *Kim* the real subject of the narrative is not the transaction—the growing up of Kim and his being trained into an efficient secret agent; or the characters—the Lama, the Babu, or the Mohammedan horse-seller; but the majestic panorama of North India, from the peaks of Tibet to the Punjab desert, and its multitude of human types, among which these leading personages take their place. In Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris,* Conrad's *Typhoon,* Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher,* and Stevenson's *Merry Men,* the chief motive of the tale is the spirit of place: the intensity of the tropics, the mystery of Gothic architecture, or the haunted aspect of a weed-grown garden or a desolate seashore. Even in those novels in which the setting is subordinate to plot and character, it is commonly of substantial importance in the narrative, and has an interest and power of its own. Imagine the novels of George Eliot, or Dickens, or Trollope, or Bennett, or Hardy without their setting. George Meredith alone of distinguished English novelists writes without a vivid sense of an abundant life about his characters. It makes a difference whether the scene of a story is in the parlour or the kitchen;

in the road or on the lawn; in the Five Towns or at Fort Yuma. For the setting is not merely the matrix in which the characters are fixed; it is the soil in which they grow, the atmosphere which they breathe, the medium which sustains, envelops, nourishes, and controls them, and determines their manner of being.

Of all aspects of the setting, the material surroundings, the "scene," is the simplest, the most pervasive, and perhaps the most important; and in the consideration of the scene, "nature" may well be treated first. *Nature* is a word of many meanings; but in this connection it plainly means the phenomena of the material universe excluding man, and man's direct handiwork. Pure nature, that is nature absolutely unaffected by human activity, is hardly to be seen on the face of the earth; and if it were to be seen, it could hardly be the subject of novels, which deal with men, and with men in society. There is ploughing, or there is smoke, or a fence, or there are at least footprints in every scene, even of an Arctic waste or an Alpine height. At sea, a novel is on shipboard, not in the welter of waves. So the nature which every man sees is never absolute wild nature in which he has no part. Yet, rela-

tively speaking, the human imprint may be stamped heavily or lightly on a scene; and in particular, objects in the country are in themselves less directly shaped by the handiwork of man than those in towns. A field ploughed and harrowed and sown is modified by the activities of men; but it is not controlled by them. The contour of the ground expresses great secular forces above and outside of man and antedating his existence. The growth of plants, their form and colour, are the work of sun-warmth and rain-water, and the life within. The farmer labours as the obedient servant of nature, and plants in faith in her strength and her trustworthiness. Continuously, over and through the rural scene natural forces, that is, forces uncontrolled, undirected by men,—winds, clouds, light, life,—work the miracle of form and colour on the face of the earth. In this sense nature plays a great part in prose fiction.

The way in which a writer feels about nature is manifested first of all by the way in which he relates his characters to the non-human phenomena of the universe. Nature in *Robinson Crusoe,* for example, constitutes merely the materially conditioning facts surrounding

Crusoe. The loneliness of the desert island makes life difficult for him; it does not touch his heart, or abash his spirit, or overwhelm his fortitude. The mountains breed goats, the sea-sands turtles, the forests pigeons; they are all his meat. The cave makes a house for him, and the fertile ground is his seed-plot. This is all: there is no relation between Robinson Crusoe and the visible world except that it warms him, or chills him, or wets him with rain, or imprisons him on an island, clothes him with skins, feeds him with rice and goats' flesh, shelters him in a cave. It does not even arouse or irritate or excite him in any way. It does not even provide him with that necessity of mankind, amusement; his dog and his parrots entertain him. But they are almost parts of himself;—humanized, not natural.

Slightly more intimate than this self-regarding view of all things animate and inanimate is the spirit of what may be called the guide-book novel: the novel in which scene after scene is brought before the eyes as an object of curious contemplation, as an object of intellectual, not of emotional interest. Such a novel is Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker,* in which the Bramble family and their train visit the notable

resorts of England, Scotland, and Wales and comment on them, each in his own characteristic fashion. There are later writers who less frankly and naïvely but quite as really divorce the life of the characters from the setting, who make "copy" of scenes, observing them curiously and interestedly, even with delicate accuracy, but coldly and aloof. Flaubert has something of this quality. The characters are studied with devoted thoroughness, and the scenes are studied with agonizing intensity; there is an intention to relate the one and the other; but each is set in place like a mosaic. The figures have hard outlines against a background.

But with many authors the relations between the characters and nature is a vital matter of the spirit; thus in the later eighteenth century sensitiveness to impressions of natural scenery is an indispensable mark of virtue. All the villains are indifferent to natural beauty of scene, and all the good people are easily moved by it, even to tears. When Lotte and Werther stand watching the approach of the storm, and are roused to a sense of might and majesty in nature, she lays a sympathetic hand on his, and with intense feeling utters the word symbolic

to her of the loftiest moral sublimity; she breathes the name of the great author Klopstock. So in Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* the heroine shudders appropriately at the entrance of every gloomy mountain pass, rejoices in the light of sunset glowing across the plains of Lombardy, or touching the roofs of Venice with a distant rosy tint, and weeps with a sentiment at once happy and melancholy in each evening twilight when the soft delicious breeze carries to her the fragrance of jasmine and the song of nightingales, the tender charm of the scene touching only the pure heart of Emily or Valancourt, and leaving the wicked and the frivolous,—Montoni and Madame Cheroni,—unmoved.

Some authors, then, bring the feelings of their characters into subjection to the moods of nature; others create the opposite relation, and cause nature to reflect the feelings of the characters. For example, throughout *Jane Eyre* the weather is suited to the events. (It is frequently bad.) The account of Jane's oppressed childhood begins on a chill, wintry day; and she enters Lowood School on a "wet and somewhat misty afternoon," with a "wild wind rushing amongst trees." The day before that

appointed for her wedding, a restless wind blows from the south, before which Jane Eyre runs with a certain pleasure, delivering her "trouble of mind to the measureless air torrent thundering through space." The first day of teaching in her retreat to Morton is one of autumnal peace:

> "The air was mild; the dew was balm!"

And the day of Rochester's second proposal has the sweetness of sunshine after rain. In Dickens, likewise, the whole of nature and even the inanimate creations of men's hands are alive with emotion. "Objects, with Dickens, take their hue from the thoughts of the characters. His imagination is so lively, that it carries everything with it in the path which it chooses. If the character is happy, the stones, flowers, and clouds must be happy too; if he is sad, nature must weep with him. Even to the ugly houses in the street, everything speaks." The façade of the Count's château, in *A Tale of Two Cities,* is as cold, smooth, and cruel as the Count's own face. Silas Wegg's stall was "the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London." The wind lives. It comes from the ends of the earth

expressly to smite poor little Toby Veck; it whispers or roars terror in the ear of the murderer, Jonas Chuzzlewit; it whirls a wild and terrible disorder into the sky and fills the air with night when Rogue Riderhood plots to swear away the life of Gaffer Hexam. To the French critic, Taine, the imagination of Dickens seems analogous to the illusions of a monomaniac, so passionately and intensely is it exercised upon its objects. In truth Taine takes this attribution of a feeling soul to all the objects of nature too seriously. It is not a mania, but a fancy, utilized as a means of conscious rhetorical effect,—not a symptom of the gloomy emotional intensity of the foggy islanders, who commit suicide in November.

Again, with other writers, the setting, instead of being subject to the characters or to any other element of the novel, determines all the rest. So Stevenson writes: "The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in the vain attendance

on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck."

Stevenson wrote not without a smile, and would have rejoiced with mischievous glee if taken quite literally; yet though he expresses not quite a faith, there is something more than playful fancy in his words. He believes that in some sense every man's spirit thrills to the vibrations of natural things; that the connection between man and nature is obscure and inexplicable but very real, that it is active in the working of deeply seated instincts, and is manifested by the power of natural scenes over the imagination. Most novelists are less mystic and more commonplace. With them nature is simply the background of a total picture, of

which human beings fill the foreground, the whole being in such harmony as the imagination and the artistic powers of the writer may create. With plain literalness, most novels recognize the obvious fact that men are in some measure determined by their natural surroundings,—determined not only as to their physical life, but as to their spiritual and emotional life. So George Eliot's slow rustics are at home in the rich quiet of Hayslope, and Barrie's lean, long-headed, disputative peasants on the rougher hillsides about the village of Thrums. The whole tendency of modern thought, alike in art, science, and philosophy, has been to recognize more and more this closeness of connection between all living things and the surrounding conditions of their life. Thus literature more and more recognizes individual men under particular conditions of place and time, and abandons faith in abstract humanity. In the novels of Thomas Hardy, the union of man and the nature about him is complete; and the universe is thought of as one whole, man being the play of forces manifest in the nature about him, but beyond his comprehension. The Woodlanders, the dwellers upon Egdon, all the folk of Wessex are not separate from nature,

but are parts of it; they think and feel and speak as beings belonging to and created by their local circumstances. Yet even in Hardy's novels, the merging of man in nature is not complete. Not even in his pages is to be found that complete moral indifference which would result from the faith that the universe is one. In such a world there could be no good and no bad; and a novelist cannot afford to abandon the moral life, the great source of tragic and comic interest, the true mother of drama.

Authors differ, in their feeling for nature, not only as to the relation existing between nature and their characters, but as to the kind of scene in which they themselves take particular interest. There are people who value nature merely as a material convenience; who prize the earth purely as a place on which to grow corn or sheep, and value a scene solely for its promise of a return in wealth. Such a state of mind, natural in some circumstances and within limits entirely reasonable, is not altogether uncommon. I have heard farmers decry the ugliness of Michigan as compared with Illinois, because so much of Michigan consisted of lake and woodland, while in Illinois one could behold the delightful scene of unlim-

ited cornfields, not broken by any such unreasonable interruptions to tillage as waste water and hills. The trees left standing in some California wheatfields are an annoyance to many eyes. The domestic and uncertain topography of the drift-covered parts of Wisconsin is to some beholders more beautiful than the bolder and more intelligible contours of the the unglaciated region, carved in delicate but massive outlines by the slow, firm chisel of running water, and this because the confused heaps of glacial waste "look richer."

Humanly natural as the valuing of scenery because of its promise of wealth may be under some circumstances, the feeling is not likely to be strong in novelists. But of the contemplative delight in natural beauty, that which rejoices without the sense of ownership or the thought of wealth, there are many types. Nearest the crude delight in mere riches is the delight in a scene which promises human comfort. Thus in the elder authors dealing with Spanish life it is a shady verdurous spot on the banks of a stream which is beautiful. The jailer in *Gil Blas* showed kindness to his prisoner by placing him where he could look from his tower toward the groves by the river, and

not over the dry plain. Like Le Sage, Cervantes has the thought of a wayside encampment in every rapturous description of a scene. The heat and drought of Spain makes these charming picnic spots beautiful, as the dusty gardens of Gulistan and the dry surface of Palestine are said to owe the praises bestowed upon them in poetry to the contrast between them and the desert.

But the really æsthetic delight in scenery is a disinterested feeling, and depends on instincts less tangible and more profound than delight in the promise of human wealth or even of human comfort. It has its source deep below consciousness, in an instinctive imaginative sympathy with those tendencies of the nature about us with which we find our own ideals, the tendencies of our own natures, to be in harmony. Most men's tastes about everything are consistent, are "all of a piece." A man demanding a strong excitation of contrast in colour, will be likely to delight in violent contrasts of sound and smell and action. He will delight in a glaring picture, a clashing symphony, a screaming farce, high-flavoured meats, a violent melodrama, a "vigorous foreign policy," and a vivid life, a life abundant in action rather

than controlled by a system and directed to a purpose. A man who loves unity and order in one part of his nature is likely to love it in all things: he prizes "composition"—systematic beauty of pattern—in pictures, symmetry in architecture, a clean-cut plot and schematic types of character in the drama, a marked and distinct evolution in a piece of music, a regulating government with a fixed policy, a precise if bounded ideal of life, contributing to efficiency in action. His friend who delights in the individual thing will like it everywhere: he will demand in a painting not so much a scheme as a vivid, a unique impression, not the generalized light of the studio but the light of two o'clock in the afternoon, in early December, by a New England brook beset with birches, each tree with its own character. He will ask not so much for a pattern as for a particular mood in his music. He will demand of a writer, as Flaubert demanded of de Maupassant, that in describing a row of cab-horses, all looking alike, all skin and bones, he shall make the reader perceive the characteristic which makes any of the wretched hacks differ from every other one, from the fifty before and the fifty after. He will ask for character not typical but unique; he

will demand variety and the exception; in the plot he will think less of the clearness of the whole than of the power which art has of fixing the evanescent charm of fleeting incident; and in morals he will insist more on abundant variety of experience than on a unity which cannot but limit nature.

So the tastes of a writer as to scenery may be an index of those deepest elements of his character, those preferences which guide intellectual decisions and irretrievably bias conduct. They may be; for it is not safe to accept them implicitly. Taste is often conventional, the preferences of one period being not those in fashion at another. No doubt many a man enjoys at second-hand, not questioning his own feelings, but accepting that which it is the thing to take delight in. There are plenty of college girls who write glib essays on Pope's lack of feeling for nature and on Wordsworth's insight into the deeper meaning of natural things, but who know no flowers or stars or birds, who cannot walk ten miles, and who find in the magnificence of storm and wind and rain only an occasion for grumbling. Again, the feeling for nature may be compensatory, so that the man of compelled orderly

conduct finds a relief in reading of wildness, and thus discharges his mind of a perilous rebelliousness against circumstance; as Cooper used to be a favourite in quiet, regulated Germany. Sometimes, also, the feeling for nature, like taste in any other field, is subordinated to other interests; as preoccupation with character may be an enemy to plot, and the two may not both be real indices to the preferences of the author. Yet after all, if due allowance is made for all these considerations, an author's preferences for special types of scene may at least be used to corroborate or to illustrate the impressions of his intellectual and moral character derived from other sources. It is no accident that Gray and Collins delight in twilight and dusk; that Wordsworth's greatest power is manifested in the impression of vast controlled force,—of the spacious sea, the stars, steadfast in their courses, the everlasting mountains; or that Byron finds the Mediterranean scene, rich in contrast, with an energy heightened beyond that of the equable North, the natural setting for his works, while his mountains, unlike Wordsworth's, delight him most when companioned by thunder or hurling down avalanches.

The novelists, like the poets, with this key unlock their hearts. Fielding is pleased by the gentle and proportioned beauty of an undulating landscape, softly touched by the hand of man,—a lovely English park. Smollett rejoices in the picturesque variety of the Highland landscape of lake and mountain, with crags and spiry firs, in place of soft hills and spreading lowland trees. Mrs. Radcliffe is pleased with indistinctly outlined scenes, having uncertain lights and shadows, at twilight or under the light of the moon, suggesting mystery; or else she revels in rugged scenes of violent contrast,—dark ravines, fir-covered slopes, and a gloomy castle in the setting sun, all again full of mystery, the mystery of dark foreboding. Sir Walter Scott's scenes are bolder, firmer, harder of outline, more vigorous in construction, and more sharp in contrast, alike in colour and form; they are fitly conceived as the setting for the actions of his interesting characters, such as Richard or Fergus, vivid and active, strong in their contrasts, and bold in their outlines.

Among recent novelists, the power of seeing and presenting scenery on the great scale and with the sublimity of vastness is a notable gift

of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. His scenes have not intimacy or delicacy; but they have sweeping immensity and extraordinary truth of relationship. The view across the valley from Purun Bhagat's shrine, whence "Purun Bhagat saw an eagle swoop across the gigantic hollow, but the great bird dwindled to a dot ere it was halfway over," the sea:

"The sight of salt water unbounded,"

the vast Indian plain;—these sights, if they do not delight him more than the gentle and circumscribed landscape of south England, are at least presented by him with peculiar power. Even in England he rejoices in the wind-swept down, and in the road which mysteriously binds region with region, and is haunted by the sense of an immense past.

There is no aspect of nature in which Mr. Thomas Hardy does not rejoice. He writes of nature, as Miss Annie Macdonell points out, not only with a countryman's knowledge and an artist's perception, but with a worshipper's devotion, with a sentiment at once warm, tender, and rapturous. He looks gently on the toad, humbly labouring across the path; he hears with pleasure the very papery scraping

of dry grass-blades on the hillside; he has an eye for the odd motions of little birds, and for the tender colours of mists, and for the gray bareness of sky and the drab bareness of dusty earth staring at each other. He delights in the winy richness of Autumn, and in the austerity of "haggard Egdon," the heath out of whose countenance "solitude seemed to look." He rejoices in nature's power and in nature's tenderness, and draws even from her cruelty a grave, fortifying strength.

The second division of the scene, the material setting, of a work of fiction, is the handiwork of man. It is easy to see that in this class of objects there is a gradation from things which are definitely a mere part of the setting to things which are really a part of the characters. The clothes habitually worn are part of the man himself; witness the embarrassment of our dreams when we are caught without them. Unclad, we are not social beings; we have not our regular functions, and we are not in command of our acts. Less frequently worn clothes are still parts of our actual living selves as we think of ourselves; but they are less intimately so than are our ordinary clothes. A man on the occasional

regalia of his lodge, a professor in evening dress which he wears twice a year, a clerk in overalls out fishing is a modified person, a person whose relation to society is dislocated.

Even the habitual surroundings may be thought of as a part of a character quite as well as of the setting. Podsnap is not only his voice and his language, but his hideously solid plate; Veneering's new and slightly sticky varnished furniture is a part of that impression which makes up what we call the man, and what he is to himself; Venus is not complete without his shop, "musty, leathery, feathery, gluey" of smell, "and as it might be, strong of old pairs of bellows"; and Rogue Riderhood and Gaffer Hexam take into themselves something of the mouldering river shore,—"discoloured copper, rotten wood, honey-combed stone, green dank deposit." A sailor on shipboard is himself as he is not in a hotel dining-room; and his ship is to his inner consciousness a part of himself; it is a part of his imagination of his own character in activity. A preacher is clothed with his pulpit as he is with his black frock coat. A bedroom is a speech proclaiming the person who occupies it. How exquisite the picture in *Faust* of Margaret's room, bare,

very poor, but breathed through by fresh and fragrant air, its white sanded floor and neatly folded linen bearing witness to her virginal purity and to her womanly sense of order.

But even these intimate parts of the human aspects of the setting are commonly thought of as separate from the characters, as detachable circumstance, as not the breath or speech of the personages but as their atmosphere and condition; and the more remote objects are of course always looked at thus. Now, in the progress of the novel from the typical and general toward the separate and unique, more and more attention is paid to the fulness of the setting, especially in its human aspects. Not alone the quality of natural scenes,—the peep of day, and the song of birds, the gleam of rivers, and the odours of Autumn, but Sixth Avenue, and the steamer *San Andreas,* and the H. and R. office, and Mr. Hardanger's new house are particularized with precision and suggestive force not alone by men with special talents like Dickens and Balzac, but by everybody.

Midway between nature and the ordinary handiwork of man is architecture. A building, still more the mass of a city's buildings, bulks

large, encloses the view, is a permanent object, bears the mark of time, in brief, makes a weighty and fixed impression, like that of the great objects of nature. New buildings are significant of the character of the community which erects or tolerates them. In America, the convention of the simplified Italian renaissance which we call Colonial, and which held its own to the middle of the nineteenth century, has a sparse dignity. The vicissitudes of taste manifested on college campuses since that day at least make plain the absence of any clear standard or purpose, and of any intelligent criticism. The brutal ugliness of the raw wall on the side of a business block tells a story, and the irregularities and incongruities in the façades of a row of business blocks likewise tell the tale of self-assertion and indifference to dignity and harmony in the public expression of a corporate life.

Old buildings, marked by time, combine human associations with the mystery and power of nature. An ancient building, Ely cathedral, the palace of Cnossus, the theatre at Taormina —an ancient building which has echoed to the verses of Euripides, the sentences of Minos, the death-scream of forgotten children, or the

prayer and the hymn in Latin and in English of the last abbot; which has been trod by the feet of generations, swift in joy or duty, slow in compulsion, shuffling or dragged in defeat; which has been splashed with the blood of rapine or retribution, and is now unroofed and washed in rain or dew, or more solemn still, is still serving for prayer or justice or domestic living;—who can look at it without giving it a soul, a human sympathy with the long generations which have passed through it in continuous stream, flowing on to that mist-covered sea the sound of which rolls for ever along the shores of life? At the same time ancient buildings touch us with power like that of the hills: they are marked and formed and coloured by natural forces; their carving has lost its fresh, crisp outlines, but gained a more appealing strangeness; ivy grows out of their walls; their columns are prostrate; they grow greater as we recede from them, like a tall tree or a mountain on the horizon.

It is this peculiar thrill of architecture, and not the charm of external nature, which captivated the imagination of the first writers to make much of the emotional power of setting. The one sincere element in Walpole's *Castle of*

Otranto was Walpole's sensitiveness to the impressions of Gothic architecture in ruin, with its suggestions of romantic mystery. So a more ample and a profounder feeling for the same kind of effect is the essential poetic quality of Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho.* In Victor Hugo's gigantic romance of *Notre Dame,* the ancient cathedral, fantastic, horrible, beautiful, possessing an energetic but agonizing life, is the hero of the tale.

In all cases where the setting has weight and significance it is the spirit of the scene, as we say, that has been interpreted; that is, it is the emotional complex evoked in the author which has been genuinely communicated. It is not the scene, in fact, but a way of feeling about the scene; not Hayslope, but George Eliot's memories of her childhood, when her father drove about in a gig with her between his knees, a child of six; not England in the days of Richard the Lion-Hearted, but Sir Walter's imagination of a rude but noble era, with its crowded hours of glorious life; not Egdon Heath, but Thomas Hardy's vision of a sinister power within the natural world, brooding without ruth upon the "purblind race of mortal men," the pitiful victims of life.

If even the material aspect of the setting is really a thing of the spirit, so much the more plain is the importance of its immaterial aspect, of the medium in which the characters live; the body of sentiments, ideas, customs, assumptions, faiths; the civilization or culture of which the characters are a part; the "milieu" of the story.

The historical novel sets out with the object of expressing a milieu, a complete social order, as a tangible imagined whole. It is true that there are many types of historical novel, but all at least ostensibly promise to take the reader back into a bygone but actual world, with its political organization, its religious faiths and customs, its ways of earning a living, its manners, its speech, its dress, its thoughts. It is the setting which in an historical novel is the motive force, the characteristic source of interest, the "marvellous" which combined with the "probable" of plot and character creates the piquancy of the story. The object of the historical novel is to create the illusion of life in a bygone age, under circumstances once existing, now vanished. If the narrative does not do that, does not make the reader feel that he is reading a tale of other

times, the book, whatever its merits, fails as an historical novel. It follows that the setting of the historical novel must be very full and ample. The face of things was strangely different in the past from what it is now. The skies, the winds, the main contours of the hills remain, it is true, unchanged; but everything else is unlike what it was. The rivers flow somewhat as they used, but within straightened banks. There was a forest over that hillside, where now the cattle are at pasture. Where there is now a willow-bordered lane running beside the lake, there was first a track along which the Indians moved out to the hunting in summer and back again in winter to their village, then a deep-rutted cartway, and then a paved road down which a stage-coach jingled. At last it is a forgotten bytrack, made useless by the railroad on the other side of the hill. Where the plough today turns up bits of potsherd from the soil in the meadow, there were smooth stone-built houses along narrow streets; and within the mound moulder the remnants of the ancient city wall, once built high and square, strong with magic strength until the day when the bar of the gate was broken, and fire with shrieking ran through the houses

behind the wall. Not alone have outward things changed, but all the conditions of life were almost inconceivably unlike those of today. All men were attached to the soil;—not alone the serfs and the slaves, but even in a degree the wealthiest and the most noble. This was the case because the fruits of the earth had in general to be consumed near where they were reaped. Trade dealt with precious things carried in small parcels, not with gross raw materials filling enormous cars and monstrous steam vessels. Accepted ideas of all kinds were different: about taking interest and the rotation of crops, and the objects of government; about religion and women; about the very foundations of right and wrong. The writer of an historical novel, then, has to conjure up before his reader's eyes all this. He must describe an unknown land; he must represent the look of an old market-place, enter the atrium or the cathedral, costume the people in the garments of their day, and make them speak typical thoughts in a language typical of the era in which they lived. Most arduous of all, he must conceive of them as each a member of a definite social group, dressed and thinking and speaking not only as a personage of a defi-

nite age and country but as a member of a class within that age and country;—a Varangian at Constantinople in the eleventh century, a Saxon thrall in 1189, a Hansa merchant in Lübeck in 1382, a Scotch archer at the court of Louis XI of France.

Moreover, this ample detail should be, and in the writings of the greatest historical novelists is, drawn from the repository of a full mind. The true historical novelist has not merely the laboriously acquired but unemotionalized and extraneous knowledge of the student; he has long let his imagination feed on the past. Thus only are gained unity and ease and energy. So Scott, long before he thought of writing an historical novel, had measured the ruins and battlefields of southern Scotland and northern England, and was so full of knowledge of Border history that he could pour forth an unceasing stream of lively or terrifying traditional narrative about the region of his loving knowledge. Likewise Thackeray in writing of the eighteenth century was dealing with an age in which he had delighted to lose himself. He had formed his style on the writings of its greater authors, and filled his mind with an abundance of detail from

its minor periodical essays. George Eliot, on the contrary, in writing of Florence in the time of Savonarola, laboriously and minutely studied the era, of set purpose resolving to acquire the "idiom" of bygone life. She was determined by force of will and knowledge to use old Florence to express ideas already in her mind. She read "a hundred books" about it; the work "ploughed into" her; it "found her a young woman and left her an old woman." The result, though brilliant and beautiful, lacks the ease and richness of the writers who followed the course of going for material to what they already knew.

The completeness with which the *idea,* the inner life, of the work has taken possession of the writer determines what may be called the theme of the book—the scheme of thought or way of approach by which all this abundant life of the imagination is made manageable. In general, it *is* as an imaginary world that the historical novelist thinks of the past, not as an historical one. He may believe that he is simply presenting his idea of a bygone age; but in reality he is taking refuge from the monotony or commonplaceness of the present in an imagined past. In that far-off time,

more entertaining things could happen than in the present day; more adventure, more thrilling escapes, bolder speeches, more decisive acts. Even a ghost or a fairy might then have been possible; or at least strange powers might have been at work in the actual world. Thus the historical novel in general is but

> "young-ey'd Poesy
> All deftly mask'd as hoar Antiquity."

This romantic quality is not transcendent, it does not reach the frank marvel of the fairy tale, or the superhuman strangeness of the epic, but it colours the story, which at the same time is told with a fulness of detail and an amplitude of characterization such as to make the whole produce the illusion of a record of fact.

The vision of the past in which the historical novel has its origin varies from author to author in its main elements; and the worth of the book varies with the worth of the vision. Each writer, in other words, has a point of view, develops a theme, writes round a central substance, determined for him by the nature of his vision. To Alexandre Dumas the elder, the movements of history depend upon the success

or failure of ingenious schemes devised by clever intriguers, and "pulled off" with theatrical brilliance, as if on a stage set for them. The question is, shall Richelieu or the Three play the successful trick? Shall the Queen have back her diamonds in time, or shall she be publicly shamed? Shall the love-affair of the King and Louise prosper? These are interesting, even exciting questions, but they are not great; they are not in the proper sense historical. For Charles Reade, the fundamental theme, the creating element in his vision of the social order is the living condition of great groups of men, determined by large general influences. Such are the state of war, national characteristics, and especially fundamental conceptions as to morals. Primary among these moral questions is the contest between the family ideal and the monastic ideal (the Cloister and the Hearth); but in addition to his leading topic he considers a multitude more of influences which affect both the outer customs of an age and its inner and spiritual habits of thought. In Thackeray, the special historical matter is little more than a setting for a domestic tale, and the course of public events serves only to celebrate the superior beauty of

peaceful love and unassuming renunciation. "History," public history, is to him only a record of mean ambitions and unworthy successes; of a Marlborough, avaricious and deceitful, victorious over the honest General Webb, of a corrupt Walpole on the one hand and a frivolous and shallow James Edward on the other. The past, in his view, is permanently interesting because of the men who wrote books, Swift and Addison and Steele, and because a noble and gentle life could once be led by renouncing pomp and glory and the vanities of this wicked world, as the Marquis of Esmond renouncing his title withdrew to the wilds of Virginia from the corruption of the English court and of English politics.

To the contemplation of Sir Walter Scott, the social order is a picturesque pageant, in which human beings are grouped in bodies, each distinguished by strongly marked peculiarities. Such bodies are Jews, peasants, religious sectaries of the most extreme types, queens, old soldiers, country lawyers. At the same time this assembly of picturesquely distinguished groups is not a mere confusion, but a great though complicated panorama. One

group plays upon and is related to another; people buy and sell, rule and are governed, and recognize the place and rightness of order and difference and relation. Above all, two great groups manifesting contrary tendencies are generally set in opposition and contend with each other, the result of their contest determining the fate of the principal characters. Indeed, Scott's titular hero is generally so placed that both the great contestants appeal to his sympathy and exert an influence upon his mind. Thus the theme of *Ivanhoe* is the contrast between Norman and Saxon, typified in salient figures like Cedric and Brian, the two ideals being reconciled in the person of Ivanhoe. The theme of *Waverley* is the conflict between the picturesque Highland nature, with its romantic loyalty to the Stuarts, and the steadier English nature, with its sober support of the House of Hanover. Waverley is played upon by all elements; indeed, he is a victim of his impressibility.

Among these visions of the past, some are more completely and deeply true than others. It is not humanly true that the really significant events of history are determined by petty machinations for personal ends; they are de-

termined by forces affecting great multitudes of men. Scott's vision of the social order, therefore, is sounder and more beautiful than Dumas's. It corresponds more truly with the complexity of human life than Charles Reade's. It recognizes the worth of the active virtues as well as the passive ones, and hence is truer than Thackeray's. It is a *better*, a more complete, just, and healthy vision of society than that of any of these other authors.

Early in this book it was remarked that the source of unity is force and completeness of imagination. One aspect of the unity thus arising is that in that in vividly conceived historical fiction the narrative of historical forces and the personal plot are one. The opposite weakness is very frequent. How many novels there are in which a series of personal adventures has been invented separately from the historical setting, which is then brought into contact with it,—is dragged in by the ears, and then bolts off the stage, until it is whistled back again. So General Washington comes into Janice Meredith's love story because the author willed to have it so. So in *The Heart of Midlothian* the Porteous riots are forced into con-

nection with the story, not uningeniously, but not from any imaginative prevision. On the other hand, in *Waverley* the fate of nations and the fate of the hero are conceived by the same strong single act of creative power. As Bagehot put it, when he wished to insist on the breadth and unity of Scott's vision: " If Scott had given us the English side of the race to Derby, he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences and also the loves of the cashier." A result of this imaginative oneness is that in the best historical novels personages who are in the foreground of history are seldom in the foreground of the novel. The greatest poems dealing with history are not about the greatest events, but about striking minor incidents. It is not Trafalgar or Waterloo, Nelson or Wellington, that have inspired famous poems, but the burial of Sir John Moore, or the sight of Calais across the Channel, or the loss of the *Royal George.* Still less are the Reform Bills of 1832 or 1867 celebrated in noble verse. The reason is that the actuality of great events and the real characters of well-known personages chain down the freedom of the imagination; that they prevent the reworking of

"Unconcerning things, matters of fact,
What Cæsar did, yea, and what Cicero said,"

into the "more philosophical" reality of the imagination, the thing permanently because humanly true. A great historical personage acting as a force in the story and seen through the eyes of a humble adherent does not provoke question. Perhaps Mary Queen of Scots was not thus, but thus she might have seemed to Richard Avenel. But G. P. R. James's Richelieu and Lytton's Warwick challenge our faith too definitely. So does Mr. Maurice Hewlett's Richard Yea-and-Nay. He is a wonderful figure, vivid and brilliant, but he is not credible. Being not merely a force, not merely a sketch in the background, but a hero, who insists upon being psychologically weighed and considered, he shocks the reader's imagination as an impossible king and inconceivable leader.

The taking of sides about matters of history, so that as between the great forces that divided men in the past, an author presents only one side sympathetically—this partisanship diminishes imaginative power, and prevents the writer from effectively presenting even the defects of that to which he is opposed. This is no uncommon fault, for the controversies of

the past live on in those of the present; and even when they do not actually continue, they provoke the same differences of temperament as in their own time. The cavaliers of today still love Mary Queen of Scots. Mr. Hilaire Belloc and Thomas Carlyle would write very differently about ship-money or Frederick the Great. The Mexican War still complicates the foreign policy of the United States. A German and a Pole will hardly express themselves alike about the Teutonic Order, or a Norseman and a Frenchman about the Roman Empire, or a New Yorker and a Canadian about the Royalists of the American Revolution. Yet nothing is more plain than that a cause which moved whole generations of men to the depths of their lives must have had some good ground for being, something noble, something capable of being considered holy. A man may on the whole oppose and condemn a cause in comparison with its opposite; but unless he can see both sides as they appealed to the imaginations of their adherents, he cannot interpret them to later ages. Thus Cardinal Newman in his novel *Callista* makes the paganism of the Roman decadence wholly evil, wholly grotesque, and powerful only with the power of Satan.

His book is an answer to Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia,* in which a certain beauty and power are attributed to heathen philosophy, in opposition to the evil qualities conceived by Kingsley to exist in sacerdotalism and monachism. Both have written one-sided books, but Kingsley's is imaginatively more one, and is more beautiful because both the contending elements are treated with a measure of sympathy, and not in hate and contempt. There are multitudes of these biased books; books which colour history to suit denominational spirit, or local patriotism. There are Church of England novels, Roman Catholic novels, novels of American or Polish bias. It is seldom that the authors have been able to rise above their partisanship into the clear air of imaginative detachment.

In its view of human character, the historical novel tends, of course, to present persons as types; to seek for the generic, and the qualities which group human beings into classes, not to consider those things which mark them as special and unique. The reason is obvious: the setting itself being strange, the classes themselves having the piquancy of uncommonness, there is no interest in seeking the strange

within the strange. The historical effect would disappear if the personages stood only for themselves and not for their age and social group. Scott, indeed, represents his characters as extreme in their class. Isaac is a Jew of Jews; Bailie Jarvie is a Bailie of Bailies. Thackeray, on the other hand, represents persons tinged but not deeply coloured by the peculiarities of their age and class. He is, even in his historical novels, more human than historical.

When Coleridge created the *Ancient Mariner,* he gained credence for the wonders of the tale by remoteness and unfamiliarity of place as well as by distance in time:

> "We were the first that ever burst
> Into that silent sea."

Historical novels do a similar thing. Their country is a strange but definite region as their era is a strange but definite age. The local quality of Scott's novels, for instance, his representation of Scotch "tangent groups," of human islands of queerness, is the most pithy and powerful aspect of his writing. Related to the historical novel, then, is the novel of

separated localities, of provincial characteristics, of the picturesqueness or oddity or romance of the regions out of the current of ordinary life. The world is now ransacked for the out-of-the-way, the side-tracked, the arrested species of humanity. Thus in Germany there is a large body of fiction concerned with local types, especially of peasants, who because of their immobility have a peculiarly strong singularity. There are novels of the Black Forest, of Mecklenburg, of Galicia. In England, Charlotte Brontë's novels are all of the North, Dickens's of the towns of southeastern England, and especially of lower-class London; Mr. Hardy, of course, confines himself to his own Kingdom of Wessex. In America, novels are inevitably local, if they are not merely panoramic;—novels of New England, indeed of Cape Cod or the Berkshire hills; novels of the San Francisco peninsula; of the Nebraska sandhills.

Just as historical novels are commonly romantic, so in the main local novels are picturesque or eccentric; in either case they aim at a certain heightening of life, at an escape from the commonplace. Miss Edgeworth's tales of the Irish squires and the successive

generations of Irish retainers, Morier's Persian picaresque novel of *Hajji Baba*, Kipling's stories of India, Bret Harte's mining camp narratives, and Miss Murfree's novels of the Great Smoky Mountains all afford examples of an intentional oddity or grotesqueness, and sometimes of a romantic directness of passion or brilliance of colouring. The special source of interest in all these tales of place is the strangeness of the setting, as in the historical novel. Hence in the one as in the other an ample presentation of the setting is necessary. Creole New Orleans as Mr. G. W. Cable saw it, the Russian village in Turgenev's stories is as palpable before the reader as any place in de Vigny's old France, or Jokai's old Hungary, or Sienkiewicz's ancient Poland. Moreover, there are living readers to challenge the accuracy of the local novelist; and indeed the writer who "makes copy" of any region may expect to raise up bitter enemies by the process. Every jest, every touch of satire, every faint shadow will be resented; even the detachment of sympathy requisite to see the social order as an artist sees it will excite some lover to wrath. Hence, it behooves the novelist of a place to be even more sedulous than the novelist of a time

as to the imaginative security and power of the setting in his narratives. Again, the historical and the local novel are alike in another matter. The imagination is tested by the unity of setting and character; the characters are of their place as in the historical novel they are of their time. Thus Bret Harte's California and his people are one in his earlier stories, but separate in his later ones, and Mr. Kipling's New England shows manifest traces of being used for copy, while his Indian tales grow naturally out of life.

The method used most frequently by the novelists who concern themselves with the effect of locality is that of Scott; that is, the representation of odd separated groups by the extreme types characteristic of their ruling tendencies. Such novelists delight in the stiffest elder of the flotsam of Covenanters stranded in North Vermont, or the most imperiously frank of untaught mountain girls in a Tennessee "Cove," or the roughest good heart of Lone Dog Camp, or the fieriest and most wasteful of Irish squires, with something generous in his broken old body. Naturally, the local novel abounds in a bold humour, a humour of exaggeration and vigorous incon-

gruity. The contrast between ordinary conditions and those of the remote region presented is always in the mind, even when it is not explicitly emphasized upon the pages of the book; and such a contrast is in itself almost inevitably humorous. There is obvious comedy in the sophisticated man imported into the naïve region, or in the naïve man brought into a sophisticated civilization: Colonel Carter of Cartersville in New York or any tenderfoot in Pioche or Wolfville. Then there are comic incongruities within the excessive natures of the main characters themselves. The exaggerations and unreasonableness, the grotesque vices and the odd nobilities of an Old Thady, the timorousness and courage, the adipose and agility, the scepticism and credulity of Hurree Baboo, are examples of the incongruities of character to which the fiction of locality tends by its nature.

Common to the local and the historical novel is the use of dialect. Dialect is merely one of the elements of the immaterial setting; in itself it has no interest except to a scientist. There is no reason why a character should use a peculiar or limited language except as that language symbolizes or makes possible the repre-

sentation of a way of thought or colours a way of life. The problem of the creation of a dialect in a novel is a difficult one. Even a slight strangeness of aspect in the words of an author is an obstacle to most readers. Even the very modest demands of Sir Walter Scott's Scotch dialect annoy or repel many. Hence the first virtue of a dialect is not to be accurate but to be expressive. The object of employing the language of the cowboy, the Norse immigrant, or the Pennsylvania Dutchman is primarily to create an imaginative illusion, not to offer instruction in phonetics. So long as the reader is compelled to labour upon details in order to create within himself the imaginative unity of the story he cannot lose himself in the vision. Hence a touch, a hint, a tinge of dialectic colour may be all that is needed in order to carry the effect: a lilt in idiom, not a systematic brogue; such a thing as Lady Gregory's delicious speech.

But an effective dialect grows from the soil of the real, is selected from the real, is developed by following the tendencies of the real. It is not made by a construction to accord with the author's notion of what a romantic or a picturesque language ought to be, but results

from an incubation in the author's mind upon actual experience. In this way only can it come to possess at once the freshness and variety of life and the appropriateness and unity of art. Stevenson jokes in one of his letters about the "tushery" of his *Black Arrow*. He pretended that he coloured or gave a tone to his conversation by means of a made-up style of speech. He could not use the *actual* language of the fourteenth century because it would not have been understood; he could not use the language of his own day because it would have destroyed the romantic illusion of the past. He implies that his language was unreal;—that it was not selected from the language of a bygone day but artificially created with a tone of romance by cheap expedients, such as a few *tushes* and *prithees* and *marrys*. Stevenson does himself less than justice, for he had no small linguistic scholarship; but the process at which he hints is not unfamiliar, and is one of the common sources of melodramatic unreality of tone in romantic novels.

But it is not only "characters" and odd people who live in separate social groups; every one belongs to a "set" or to several "sets";—those who are central and normal

quite as much as the provincial and the eccentric. Every town above the size of a modest hamlet has its cliques and its circles. The larger the place, the more special and curious the points of contact of these groups. Only in a metropolis can enough folklorists be got together to have a regular meeting, enough enthusiasts for chamber music to insure regular concerts, enough Babis to form a congregation. Only the metropolis has a Ghetto large enough for a city by itself. The more central the centre, therefore, the more abundant the divergences.

The novel, by its nature, is a composition appealing to the middle class. In novels, generally speaking, the well-to-do middle class is normal, and other groups are defined by divergence from it. But within the middle class there are myriads of groups and it is in one of them that the novelist leads his own life. There he is at home; elsewhere he is but a spectator or at best a friendly visitor. Thackeray's novels are all conversant with "Society," or with the group of dependents upon "Society." Dickens's normal person, a rather colourless individual, is definable as a modest, decent, young fellow, of less prosperous original

than Thackeray's people, who has to make his own way in a gentlemanly calling. "Society" and the poor are alike external to him. George Eliot sees everything through country eyes. Hardy is steeped in "Wessex"—and not upper-class Wessex. Broadly speaking, novelists tend to mark off as "outside," those social groups which are "outside" to the prepossessions of their youthful experience. Sometimes a novelist migrates to a new centre and to a new point of view, as Henry James moved out from America and then saw America as interestingly eccentric from the vantage-ground of Europe. Only from the outside can eccentricity be detected; only the writer born or educated into detachment can enjoy a group as an object of humour or as an object of contemplative delight. The insider loves and hates; the outsider admires and smiles. So it is usually with a note of externality that social groups are defined and exploited in literature; as the Scotch peasant by Scott, or the people of Thrums by Barrie, or the Creoles of Louisiana by Cable.

The novel, being social and town-bred, uses as a material symbol distinguishing its social groups largely the interiors of houses, with

their furnishings. The reason is that the conventional taste manifested in this way is the most delicate and precise social barometer and definer of classes. There are parlours which are sat in, and parlours which are never sat in except at a funeral. There are Wingless Victory parlours, parlours with large conch shells on the mantelpiece, easy-going parlours with comfortable shabby chairs, parlours of every degree of expensiveness from the plush-three-piece-suit parlour to the sunken-fountain-with-palms parlour. The Portland Place interior is necessary to define the Duchess of Wrexe; and the Chinese dragons and the tapestry are almost mystically typical of her disappearing glory. The shoproom and the parlour and the serving maid's cave below stairs are essential to mark off the two girls in *The Old Wives' Tale.*

Of all the aspects of the setting of an individual life, the most inclusive and the most fundamental is the body of assumptions made by the social group of which that life is a part: the things taken for granted without discussion, commonly without explicit framing or even definite consciousness of their existence. These fundamental assumptions are commonly ex-

pressed in the ways people have, in social habits in the tendency of current proverbs, in everyday judgments; they are incarnate in the customs of the community. So loyalty to the king used to be an assumption; no one questioned it, and when it was questioned, blasphemy was committed. Thus it is now with national patriotism, or family obligation, or current religious faiths; they are taken for granted, they are bases of life. Every social group, little or big, coheres about a body of assumptions, commonly many. Assumptions about social worth are the quaintest. To spin cotton is worthy; to weave wool is to belong to a lower social class; but to import goods from India is to be a member of an aristocracy. Or, all gainful occupations are socially inferior except brewing on a large scale; or, you may labour in the fields, but you must not labour in the house.

There can be no doubt that the setting plays a part in the recent novel far greater than that which it played in the novel of the past, even of the not very distant past. The novelist of today,—Mr. Cannan or Mr. Fowler as much as Mr. Conrad or Mr. Bennett—both labours and rejoices to present not only the character and his acts, but also the conditions out of

which the character has grown, and the medium which has made his acts mean something definite. In the novel of today, the characters spread abroad and thrust out tentacles and move and breathe, but would collapse into shapeless disorganization if they were lifted out of their proper element. The plot, too, is presented not as a thing in itself, but as something caused and conditional, as a thing possible and characteristic only in its own milieu; —in a middle-class dissenting household with a place at Richmond, or in the Irish set of lead miners up Sinsinawa Creek;—as germinating in a special soil, begotten, grown, not made, and hence requiring an air which it can breathe and its proper food. As the setting has thus grown in importance and advanced in definiteness, the efforts of authors to create—not the illusion—but the impression of reality, especially as to the facts of sense, have greatly increased; and their technical skill in this respect has of course advanced enormously. A thin or inadequately studied setting is not acceptable in an author of the day. Elder authors insisted relatively less on this aspect of their novels, and were often satisfied with "neutral" or broadly conventionalized settings.

Place side by side the descriptive phrases of the eighteenth century and those of any contemporary writer of fiction. Smollett's Jerry Melford was exposed to a violent storm; "the cordage rattled, the wind roared, the lightning flashed, the thunder bellowed, and the rain descended in a deluge." The Spectator was in the country one pleasant evening, and "the birds made a most agreeable concert." In Mr. Hugh Walpole's *The Dark Forest,* the moon is now "a curved moon, dull gold, like buried treasure," now a "slip of an apricot moon." "The dark plum-colour in the evening sky soaked like wine into the hills." On a wet day the rain came down "in heavy plopping smothers." How piquant, how arresting and vivacious, how intimate also, and how immediately real the effect of this sharply accented background. Yet how disturbing, how difficult to command a general view and to find a perspective in the energetically distracting books of our day. Hazlitt says of Clarissa Harlowe: "Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, in her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting." The glitter of small points, the

vibratory scintillation of lively detail involves the danger of triviality, restlessness, or superficiality of effect. Only by a peculiar force of genius can a passion for the "number of things" of which "the world is so full" be made to contribute to the sense of unity, of law and largeness, and depth. All the greater is the achievement of those novelists such as Tolstoy, who can combine a very ample and spirited setting with a firm transaction and distinct characters.

The causes of the preoccupation with setting are bound up with the general tendencies of thought in the last century, and especially with evolutionary conceptions. The evolutionary philosophy, of course, lays stress upon environment. Living organisms draw their origin and sustenance from their environment; they are known only by their response to their environment, and their life is throughout conditioned by their environment. The idea of a personality as emerging only from an environment, as understood only by reacting to it, as moulded by it, was inevitable in this age. In earlier authors who elaborate their setting, in Dickens, for example, the setting is indeed a *setting*,—a work of art wrought so that in it

the jewel character may be set forth to advantage. In Dickens's writing the setting is subordinate to the characters, adjusted to them, dependent upon them, almost made by them. Not before George Eliot is the interaction of character and surroundings, the setting as the source or medium of character, and the matter upon which the character must work in order to be manifest, at all definitely realized. Since her day, the setting has become not only a necessary *datum,* but a force, sometimes a fatal and overwhelming force, in the narrative. Even yet, the setting, the environment of character, is conceived of by the novelist as stable, and is commonly looked at with ironic or pessimistic eyes. The notion of the environment as itself evolving, a large and impartial seizure of human conditions, an imaginative realization of the multiform adaptations of character possible in relation to the same moral environment, involving a subtler and more complete study of temperament than any hitherto attempted, all this offers a field only faintly and timidly entered by the writer of fiction.

CHAPTER VII

THE POINT OF VIEW

A NOVEL is not merely the actual story which it tells, not merely the transaction, the characters, and the setting. With the best will in the world the author cannot keep out of what he writes his thoughts, his emotions, his sentiments, his nature; and most authors have no desire to do so. A novel displays a point of view, it expresses preferences, it manifests at least a habit of selective attention and a sense that one thing is more important than another. Always there has been breathed into it a pervasive atmosphere, an air of thought.

George Eliot's novels, for example, come before her in the form of the solution of definite problems. We are almost conscious in reading her novels that we see forming round her characters the medium in which they have their being, and that we see the characters themselves growing up round some relation in life, some difficult human situation. One can dis-

cern the problem incarnate in Maggie, or in Dorothea; each character is the answer to a question thrust at him by his relation to others. Lydgate is the answer to a problem; so is Tom; so is Silas Marner. In the end the characters "come alive," they "stand on their feet"; but they are born of an agony about a question of conduct. The problems of Mr. Thomas Hardy are announced by that writer with bitter energy, sometimes on his very title-pages. Only with him the personages themselves are the problems. The world is not there for them to answer; they are there for the world to answer. What has the world replied to the question Tess? to the question Jude? to Elfride? to Eustacia? The central interrogation put by his works, then, is about the justice of the social order, or of the universe itself, not about the righteousness of men.

Sir Walter Scott in no such definite way presents or conceives the central idea of his works. He is definitely sure of the better and worse, and never thinks of discussing it or making it the vital issue of his narratives. For him his judgments of moral worth are data, things assumed and certain, but definitely present in his work. His ideal—clear, simple,

assured, and decent; active, picturesque, and generous; but mundane and superficial—has caused him to be praised by many critics of many schools for his moral health. In his own day he was a force in the social and political and even in the moral world. Ruskin went so far as to call him "the truest philosopher of his time," and the "writer who has given the broadest view of ordinary modern thought," and declared himself a "Tory of the old school—of Homer's or Sir Walter Scott's"; while Cardinal Newman traced the aspiration for a richer and more highly coloured life, the aspiration which was the source of the religious movement in which Newman was himself a part, chiefly among immediate influences to Sir Walter Scott's romances.

In the writing of Dickens the moral ideas consciously presented in the forefront of the work are not very important. There are many such, sometimes insisted upon with portentous seriousness, as in *Martin Chuzzlewit,* in which a study of types of selfishness is announced as the subject of the book, or in *Our Mutual Friend,* in which a tremendous apparatus teaches Bella Wilfer humility and sweet unselfishness. But the real moral element is the

pervading spirit of compassion, and the spirit of respect for the individual. All tender things, poor children especially, are compassionately and sympathetically presented; the spirit of pity and the sense of individual worth are present as a temper, as an ever-present and conscious power guiding the work, and manifest through its total effect.

And finally in all these writers, as in all others, below and besides these definite teachings and coherent ideals, there is something more subtle,—a temper, a taste, a quality, even more ethereal than Dickens's spirit of pity. There is a sophisticated and erudite voluptuousness, for example in Mr. Hewlett's earlier novels, a full-bloodedness, sometimes coarse, in Fielding, a deep intellectual sense of responsibility in Meredith. In brief, there is in every novel something, call it an idea or a point of view, or a tone or temper,—something in the way of reflection, a judgment and preference, explicit or implicit, and distinguishable from the narrative in itself.

In the field of ethical speculation novelists are copious and decided in expressing their views.

The earliest full-bodied English realists,

Bunyan and Defoe, were theologians. Bunyan creates his almost-novel, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman,*—the strictly credible biography of a sordid sinner in a little English town,—about a moral problem, viewed in the light of his theology; Defoe interlards his story of *Robinson Crusoe,* the story of a solitary man thrown back on his own resources, material and spiritual, with long passages of theological reflection. The first great English novelist of character and sentiment, Samuel Richardson, is likewise the first "problem" novelist: his tales are essentially nothing but the framing and the solution of problems as to the morals of sex. Casuistry, the consideration of cases of conscience, is the very stuff of his works. Not less is his great contemporary and antagonist, Henry Fielding, a systematic moralist. Fielding, the first great English novelist of the panorama of real life, opposes to the deliberate and meticulous moralizing of Richardson a doctrine of the morality of the heart; he makes the thesis of his greatest work the idea that no essentially sympathetic nature can become too debased for regeneration, no matter how often it fails, or how low it falls. He praises unworldly simplicity, attacks hypoc-

risy and selfishness, and sermonizes boldly and frankly. "His wit is wise and detective, lighting up a rogue and flashing upon a rascal like a policeman's lantern." Even the hard Smollett abounds in caustic reflection upon the injustices of the world. Sterne and Dickens and Thackeray each in his way and with a difference hymn the beauties of the gentler, the sympathetic virtues. Jane Austen presents the rational dignity of an ordered life not without true sentiment and controlled emotion. Charlotte Brontë rejoices in the energy of sincere passion, not unbridled, and in the glory of will. Stevenson proclaims joy, not of licence but of life, as a duty; Meredith is a conscious and elaborate moral philosopher; so is Hardy, so is Wells, so is Galsworthy. In other European countries the same thing is true. "Realists" or "scientific novelists" especially have doctrines to convey. How indeed can there be any humour if nothing is irrational? and how any seriousness if nothing is more worthy than anything else? Flaubert studies the downward course of a trivially selfish woman; Zola presents a picture of the horrors of drink, conceives an epic of degenerate inheritance; is a critic of the tendencies which he

portrays. Tolstoy is a master teacher of his age. Barrès and Rolland, Galdós, Fogazzaro, d'Annunzio, all without exception raise with energy, whether with wisdom or not, questions as to the moral conventions of society and the quality of human conduct. All prose fiction involves a "criticism of life."

To be sure, some writers, or most or all writers, are indifferent or hostile to certain accepted prepossessions as to moral excellence. They criticize the judgments of society and the laws of the state concerning marriage and divorce, or wealth, or education; but the more rebellious they are, the more consciously they moralize. The play of Mr. Wells's mind, or Mr. Galsworthy's on marriage and property, of Mr. Barrès's on education results in the promulgation of a theory, or even a program, of reform. These men are not morally indifferent. A doctrine, then, commonly a doctrine of ethics, may be expected in a novel, sometimes explicit, sometimes manifest in the theme of the book, sometimes implied in the speeches of the characters, or in incidental words of the author.

If this be true, if novels urge moral considerations, why is it that some novels which do so are the greater for their weight of sub-

stance, while others are obnoxious because of the very definiteness of their moral teaching? Why do we respect *War and Peace,* but speak with a certain condescension of *John Halifax, Gentleman,* and deride *Eugene Aram?* We praise those who are sincere, who are not exploiting the moral life of men for thrills and excitement, but whose laughter is genuine, and whose griefs are actually felt. It is the hollowness of *Monte Cristo* and *Eugene Aram* that is offensive; it is the real anguish and indignation of *Richard Feverel,* the sincere amusement of *Tristram Shandy,* in which the reader rejoices. Again, we praise those who are intellectually great, who address themselves to great problems and who treat them fundamentally. We find Trollope pleasant but superficial; we know that Tolstoy rouses and stirs us profoundly; we do not agree with him, but he forces us to contemplate important matters in a serious way.

We praise those who have energy. We overlook Balzac's lapses of taste, we slip by Hugo's shams, we endure the gloom of *Wuthering Heights,* we condone the diffuseness of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend,* because every one is vital. It is better to be crude than tame. But

we praise highly only those who with energy unite control. There is something incoherent in the fine ardour of Mr. Wells, there is a spasmodic violence in Jack London, which proves not only that neither possesses the balance of a consummate artist, but that neither has the force of high genius which endures to the perfection of its work.

Finally, we praise those who have so made their moral ideas one with their whole conception under the power of the imagination that nothing is left unassimilated or incongruous—in whom the moral doctrine does not overcome or override the concrete imaginative definiteness of their tale but is inseparable from the narrative itself. A true imaginative creation, however strong the moral impulse, is not an allegory, still less is it a pamphlet, but is a coherent organic whole. This is true even of so symbolic a writer as Hawthorne, whose moral ideas are indeed substantial and capable of being separately expounded, are in fact the motive forces of his narratives, but are yet so absolutely incarnated in persons and so completely expressed in concrete acts that to be separated they must be torn away from the stories and mutilated. This is true also even

of Thackeray, whose little sermons are but pleasant comments on a narrative complete and autonomous,—not its guides and controllers. But even in works as genuine as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Norris's *The Pit* the fire does not burn clear; the imagination flames, but cannot wholly reduce the mass of observation and thought to itself.

Novelists themselves will not permit their readers to put wholly aside the moral aspect of fiction. But naïve and inexpert readers judge this moral aspect crudely and by inapplicable standards. Some like books because they like the people in them, and condemn other books because they condemn the characters.

The idea that only admirable characters should be presented in works of fiction is not consciously held by any but very young readers, but is approached by those who do not care to read authors who "insist on their becoming acquainted with people they would never care to meet in real lie," as superficial readers used to say about Mr. Howells. The most important function of literary art is to extend the necessarily narrow limits of experience, and by wakening an imaginative sympathy with fortunes alien to our own, or with natures which,

though human, we cannot easily enter, to strengthen the foundations of our humanity, and to enlarge our conception of ourselves. But there is this atom of truth included in the idea that the value of a work is in proportion to the ethical value of the characters in it;—the power to conceive and to create genuinely lovely personalities is itself a mark of inner imaginative nobility. To create a coherently worthy and interesting human being, to imagine finely toned men and women, not priggish and not violent; not giggling or affected or petty; with positive elements of loftiness and force and charm; but credible, human, actual;—Lucy Desborough, Henry Esmond, Leatherstocking,—is to stand in so far higher than those authors do who cannot catch that finer note. That Fielding's best have in them something of grossness, that Miss Jane Austen's best lack ardour and self-sacrifice, that Dickens's most virtuous are mushy, that Balzac's most virtuous are vulgar, are manifest weaknesses of those great authors, while it is again their praise that Fielding's better personages should be so generous, Jane Austen's so delicately right, that Dickens's should so joy and sorrow with others, that

Balzac's should possess so spirited an energy.

The presence of a high ideal of good is an excellence; but it does not follow that the absence of intense evil is also an excellence. On the contrary, evil is a necessity in the highest imaginative work, but good is a luxury. Without evil there is no action. Good—the attained good, balanced perfection—is in itself static. Good is a power only in conflict, and to be in conflict it must oppose an evil. The lower or inappropriate good becomes evil. The nature of any good becomes apparent only when it is threatened or fails to recreate itself, that is to say when it is fighting or dying. The novelist who is not occupied with evil—with pain or sorrow or sin or crime—with good as a live force, that is to say, in struggle for existence, and accordingly with evil as its measure, has not fathomed the depths of character or understood the nature of the universe. He suffers from inadequacy of motive. A great imagination compasses and is moved by great things, especially great evils. Without the ability to envisage evil, it has and can have no moving force. But it must know evil as evil: not as a mere excitement, but as a serious concern of man, as grave and terrible.

Some people judge novels by the standard of conventional decency, and praise them in proportion to their reticence. Reticence and decency require no defence; without them there is no human dignity possible. By them we are raised above the hard conditions of our life. But a compelled reticence as to subject-matter, timorous silence about the deep and plain facts of life, weakens the entire moral fibre of a man or a book. Limitations upon the free play of mind have been compared to blinders. Really they are tinted and distorted spectacles. It is not that every writer is obliged to contemplate all of life,—every pomp and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful desires of the flesh. Plenty of good novels have nothing to say about politics, or money, and some have nothing to say about love. They tell the truth, though not all the truth. But to leave out, to gloss over, to dissolve away, not in obedience to temperament and interest, but in obedience to a fear or a command—that it is which "maketh a lie." Sex, for example, is a profoundly important physical fact with spiritual consequences. The finger on the lips, the tiptoe step, and the averted face will not avail to annul the facts

and consequences of sex in life, and forbidding the sincere consideration of them in books would shut up Homer and Shakespeare and the Bible. There are indeed writers who violate the reticence of convention not frankly but cunningly, in order to obtain that shock of strangeness which is essential to interest. They are insincere, as all sensationalism is insincere, and they manifest the paucity of their own creative power.

Some novels teach a specific doctrine; many authors hold a philosophy; all books and authors express a bent of mind or inner temper. To illustrate. In George Eliot's *Silas Marner* there is a doctrine, so definite, so conspicuous and insistent, that the story might well be called a fable, and end with a moral tagged at the conclusion. The teaching of the book is that the force which leads to excellence in human conduct is sympathetic and affectionate service for others. It is loving and caring for the child Eppie that saves Marner; it is self-seeking that destroys Dunstan; it is the timidity of a selfish man that impairs the life of Godfrey. The central theme is the blighting and regeneration of Marner's life by the loss and the regaining of a natural human affec-

tion. The moral is if anything too obvious, too mechanical and laboured. Like any fiction presenting the consequences of conduct, the story raises the question whether the consequences are inevitable, whether any fiction can indeed lay the foundation of truth. Suppose Eppie had turned out badly—children do. Suppose she had been cold-hearted or greedy; suppose she had been thievish or impure. What would have happened to Marner? Is it probable that the mere act of sacrifice, the mere instinctive tendency to kindness would have benefited him? Would he have returned to his hermit life? Would he have been the more completely shattered? What if Godfrey and Nancy had had a child. The more one raises such questions, the more one sees that a book does not so much teach morals as bring to consciousness the moral ideas which are already latent in the reader's mind.

Hence it is interesting to find in *Silas Marner* below the obvious sermon a philosophy, a view, the strength and definiteness of which in George Eliot's mind is not made evident except by a comparison of this book with others of her writings. George Eliot has a doctrine of the measure of moral worth much more thorough-

going than her doctrine of the impulses which lead men to pursue the good. She believes that that is good which is good in the long run for mankind as a whole, and encourages the practice of conscious and thoughtful deliberation. She does not put much faith in a morality of impulse or instinct or mere goodheartedness, but in a morality of foresight, of strenuous self-abnegating reason. The object is the general social good; the method is well-considered intention and careful consideration as to the results of action. A "general honest thought" would be a poor excuse with her. Still less would she condone warm-hearted negligence. The chief object of her attack is a heedlessly selfish person, like Arthur Donnithorne, who repents once his eyes are open to the real effects of his deeds, or Tito Melema, who goes downward from mere facile self-glorifying deceit to cheating, to betrayal, to treasonous baseness, through lack of courage to face distant consequences. It is the *clear-sighted* rectitude of Nancy Lammeter which she especially praises; the self-deceiving indistinctness of Godfrey which she especially condemns. It is not the wicked but the slack whom she assails, and not the ecstatic but the wise whom she praises.

There is a touch of science about her morals, of a detached insistence that counting the cost is essential, which is peculiar to her.

In Sir Walter Scott the inculcation of a definite moral lesson is not the obvious purpose of the novel, but none the less a doctrine is communicated, and a judgment of life is the impelling force of the story. His compositions are a stimulus to picturesque and decided action. They all cry:

> "Sound, sound the trumpet, fill the fife;
> To all the sensual world proclaim
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name."

Sir Walter is the most vigorous apostle of vivid strenuousness. He is an aristocrat and a conservative because aristocracy is interesting and conservatism is picturesque. His temper is not selfish or stupid. He values the distinction of classes and would maintain it vigorously, but he prizes and respects every class; he treasures the riches of antiquity and the power of tradition, not blindly for themselves but as a source of social strength and beauty. In truth, below his conservatism and his traditionalism we can discern the preferences which

made him the apostle of a romantic spirit in government and even in religion to his generation. He loved a social order full of variety and contrast, a society of distinguishable and clearly marked groups, not one in which there is a democratic community of individuals, all dressed alike, all looking alike, and every one pursuing his own ends. The aristocratic society marks classes by external difference of appearance, cherishes quaint ancient usage, is at once more orderly and more interesting to the view than a democratic society. It is this —this salience, this sharpness of conscious difference—which delighted Sir Walter; his conservatism was a matter of æsthetic preference, not of rational analysis.

In each of these authors, then, there is beneath or apart from the morals of the stories a point of view, a theory of life, conscious or unconscious. But deeper still there is a temperament. Much more moving in George Eliot's writings than the moral lesson or the general ethical philosophy is the sentiment about life which rests in the brooding depths of her nature. To her, human life—every human life—is a grave and painful mystery. Every nature bears within itself a spirit, an

ideal, inherited from the past and urgent to be realized, and meets in conflict a condition about it, also created by the past, with which this ideal cannot be wholly reconciled, and before which the individual must bow. There are those who accept, who yield, who patiently and with heroic submission make the best they can of life, who

> "Do their broken weapons rather use,
> Than their bare hands."

Such was the first sorrow and the great obedience of Mary, as George Eliot conceived it, and such is in a measure the sorrow of every human being. And this fate George Eliot accepts not defiantly or sternly, but with a grave quietude: the tone of Adam Bede, of Maggie Tulliver, of Dorothea, of Romola, the temper of *Silas Marner*. For Nancy and Eppie, for Silas, even for Godfrey, there is a shadowed happiness possible, a crumb of comfort, humbly not joyfully accepted. Thus in George Eliot, beneath her conscious doctrine and beneath her ethical philosophy lies this tone or spirit—this sobering but not gloomy sense of the painful mystery of the universe,

of the inevitable cramping if not of the inevitable tragedy of life.

Again, deep below the philosophy of Scott are his temperament and physical constitution. He delights in bold firmly outlined scenes, in decided contrasts alike of form and colour. His descriptions manifest power both of grouping and of salient detail, but no delicacy of nuance. His style is neither subtle nor profound, but firm and vivid. His senses were blunt, his body healthily restless when not provided with activity. In brief, the temperament of the relatively insensitive man of motor character is written decisively upon all his work.

The novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, unlike many of his shorter stories, do not often inculcate moral doctrines with external symbolic definiteness. The inner moral life is dealt with energetically in *Markheim* and *Will of the Mill,* less seriously and less profoundly in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* But in *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* is there any doctrine? They seem to be written just for fun, for the sheer pleasure of excitement in a story of action. But that is a doctrine. It teaches at least that fun is worth while, that adventure

is a fine kind of fun. With less definiteness, but not ineffectively it teaches a morality the opposite of George Eliot's deliberate calculation of consequences, and justifies leading one's life as an exploit, not hesitating on the brink and measuring distances, but plunging in and swimming out beyond one's depth. It justifies forgetting the pettiness of circumstance and the unrelenting certainty of hard conditions and the tameness of actuality in the brisker change and the more vivid uncertainty and the more lively coloured life of a special kind of imagination.

But the real inner doctrine of Stevenson's work is that spirit of delight in the contemplation of activity to the reality of which in his own life there is abundant testimony. He tells us that he never felt a moment's dulness in a railway station, there was so much to look at. To the healthy body every kind of experience that does not threaten life and is not wearisomely repeated is probably pleasant. It is pleasant to go hungry and cold and wet whipping the streams; it is pleasant to lie idly on one's back watching the clouds float overhead; it is pleasant to drag in logs, and pleasant to lie by the fire; it is pleasant to labour in the hayfield, to

ride, to walk, to talk, to sleep. Whatever Stevenson saw he rejoiced in.

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> I am sure we should all be as happy as kings."

Nor was this delight æsthetically sterile, the shivering admiration of the duffer, who cannot swim, or the purely selective admiration of the hunter after human *bric-à-brac*. Stevenson's character was itself active; and his delight in life is that of a sweet-tempered invalid who blesses the activity in which he cannot himself engage. There is no snobbishness in him. But he is not aimlessly strenuous, not a hustler, either of the trotting or the slashing type. His fine young men, not too brilliant or too keen, get into danger by an excess of curiosity or of confidence. They meet it with something better than serenity, with a certain relish, even at the moment of fear, and they prove their manhood not by wisdom, but by steadfastness and devotion, with a certain graceful readiness to accept what comes, be it martyrdom or joy. *The Sieur de Malétroit's Door* is the type of all the narratives; the heroes, David and Jim and Archie and Henry, all press into a dark passageway in life, meet the unexpected danger

with genuine, shivering, boyish fear but with desperate boyish courage, fight with zest, and conquer with grace.

In the novels of Henry James the groundwork of the action is singularly like that in Stevenson, while everything else in them is so directly contradictory as to seem intended to oppose every thesis of Stevenson about life and conduct. The one thing alike in the two novelists is that in each the main characters go it blind into a dark passageway. Stevenson's heroes plunge into physical danger. In James's novels the adventurer who sails without a chart into the waters of a dangerous ocean is a prosperous American who enters the complicated society of aristocratic Europe. The fascination of life to Stevenson is in the joy of combat and of victory over danger. The fascination of life to James is the somewhat awed contemplation of danger itself. To James danger is real, alarming, ever-present; to be met with circumspection, with caution and deliberate consideration; to be circumvented commonly rather than to be overcome. The mood of his writing, accordingly, is not of zest but of anxiety.

In James as in Stevenson, the novels seem

to have taken their beginning from the setting. The authors seem to have said to themselves, "Given these surroundings, such and such things would be likely to happen," not, "Given these people, they would do thus and so," or, "Given these events, they fit such and such people in such and such conditions." With Stevenson, the setting is the spirit of place, the instinctive romantic response to a physical scene. In James it is the more complex but no more subtle quality of a moral environment, the total spirit of a social order. The matrix of his novels is a better-class or even aristocratic European group, now French, now English, now international. Each group is provided with a great body of commands and an even more formidable code of prohibitions,—assumed, acted on, never avowed,—fixed and fundamental, and so completely assimilated by those who have grown up in them that without ever coming to open expression they have become grounded in the very nature of the members of the group. Thus Europeans are "finished." The man who is an outsider to these conventions, the American, however shrewd or noble, is an enemy, and—so coherent the group, so at one with itself in its

acceptance of its fundamental ideas—a certain victim. He must conform or suffer, sometimes in pocket, sometimes in affection, but always and essentially in self-esteem. Daisy Miller must die because she is talked about; Newman must carry about a sense of disgust and humiliation because he has found other people rascals; the Princess of in *The Golden Bowl* must suffer the same sickening sorrow more intensely because it is her husband and her friend who have been unworthy. The hero's or heroine's sense of personal dignity,—it is this which is attacked and this which is defended; and the hero suffers in this point, sometimes obvious personal humiliation, sometimes a desperate consciousness of unworthiness, sometimes the sense of debasement which results from being obliged to think worse of human nature than you had been accustomed to.

James's heroes use up their intellectual strength in becoming aware of the enormous, baffling mass of convention about them, in focusing the complicated problem which arises out of their relation to their alien surroundings, and in endeavouring to find the solution —a difficult one—imposed by their own nature and the conditions. The energy of their will is

mostly consumed in combating the urgency of their raw and uninstructed impulses. In the end, the result is very often the victory of inhibition over action. The characters know that:

> "Unto the man of yearning thought
> And aspiration, to do nought
> Is in itself almost an act;"

They forget the warning:

> "But woe to thee if once thou yield
> Unto the act of doing naught!"

A certain resemblance is to be traced between the ideas of George Eliot and of Henry James. In both the environment is unfriendly to the individual's well-being; sometimes it is merely a cramping limitation, at other times it is the deadly enemy of his freedom. "We sympathize with the individual; we know that the triumph of the general is inevitable." And from this view which they hold in common arises an ethics which has common elements, an ethics of caution and foresight, of wary preparation and the calculation of distant consequences. Yet the larger determining features of their philosophy, of their moral temper, are

very different. The two are widely unlike in that most profound element in the view of life, the valuation of worths. In George Eliot the most precious of all things is the general good, and the most precious thing in the individual is moral coherence in holding to that great end, the larger end, in which the individual finds his soul by losing it. The main worth in Henry James is the sense of honour. The dangers which threaten the individual are indeed many;—corrupt Europe robs him of money or love or reputation,—but what hurts most is humiliation. One feels of James's finest souls,—of Maizie and the Princess, that they have learned to renounce, to renounce with wounded but loving hearts, but their chief wonder is the dignity that surrounds them, and not their love and purpose. Again, George Eliot and James differ in weight and largeness. Relatively, the later writer is superficial. Painful as the tone of his writings is, like hers, it is not like hers gravely and nobly sad, because the pains suffered and the consolations received are not so largely and deeply human as hers.

The attempts to characterize the thought and temper of the authors referred to have been introduced for purposes of illustration. They

are meant to exemplify the truth that the thought and temper of novelists are at least as important in the building up of their works as plot and character or any other recognized technical or imaginative element. These analyses are no doubt sketchy and inadequate; this or that one may be erroneous; but they take one necessary way of approach to the appreciation of an author. Critics of deeper insight or finer imagination might supplement or correct them, but only by the same method by which they have been formed: the ardent and obedient attempt to realize the author's meaning imaginatively from his works followed by the effort to make explicit in exposition that which has been implicit in the narrative.

At the same time, the most nearly adequate and most sincere and thorough interpretation by a critic of the finest insight must always fall short of the full meaning, even the full intellectual and moral meaning, of a truly imaginative novel. That meaning is inseparable from the actual book itself; it is the soul of the characters and events; it is the life of the very turn of phrase. Abstract expression may approximate it, but can never reach it. All imagination has a quality of infinity; it defies cate-

gories, and refuses to be clamped down in abstract terms. When a dogma is adequate to a work of art, or even when its definite doctrine is easily separable from the expression of it, there is in so far a defect in the work. In so far *The Egoist* is not so great as *Richard Feverel,* or *Silas Marner* as *Adam Bede.* The conception so often insisted upon in this book, of imaginative unity, is applicable here also. The doctrine and sentiment are one with the story, are inseparable from it, are inevitably, not consciously, present, and are inevitably, not consciously, assimilated by the reader. This very intangibility is the source of their great power. Without arousing antagonism they take possession of the mind, and by controlling the sympathies and stimulating the visionary powers determine the direction of the emotions both as to their objects and their character. The analytic effort, moreover, to express abstractly and explicitly that which is concrete and implicit in the book itself is attended by certain dangers. There is the danger of formulas, of applying as principles what are only methods, of taking the abstractions drawn from one type of works and applying them to another type which has grown from different

conceptions. It is unsound to condemn *Kim* because it is not so subtle as *The Golden Bowl,* to condemn Scott because he is not Miss Austen, or Hardy because he is not Meredith. There are many examples of such narrow criticism, notably by novelists themselves, who feel that the failure of other writers to apply their methods is a condemnation of the methods. Besides the danger of losing flexibility is the danger of satisfying oneself with the framing of an abstraction about an author, as if the object of reading were criticism. Some sophisticated readers, when they have found the phrase for an author, can see nothing beyond it. This is idolatry—the worship of the image which the critic has made unto himself —a sin which blinds the eyes and hardens the heart.

At the same time, analytic criticism is not useless. It is often,—perhaps generally,—true, that a critical interpretation of a great author's nature has been necessary to mediate between him and the public, even the intelligent public. So Coleridge and Wilson interpreted Wordsworth to the English public. So Thackeray had to be defended from the charge of cynicism, and Stevenson had to be justified as

something better than a mere writer of tales of adventure. With all these men it was their philosophy, their tone and temper, more than their art, which it was the task of criticism to expound. The practice, moreover, of critical analysis has its own value. The effort to grasp and define the tendency of an author's thought, so long as this effort does not usurp the place of real and direct assimilation, assists in intensifying and refining the reader's imaginative re-creation of the author's vision. To struggle with a great author's mind manifests the greatness of a great book, and shows how distinguished an achievement it may be to make a book which falls far short of being very great. If this little study of the novel leaves its readers with the feeling that it is a tremendous thing to write a fine novel, that success is complicated, that failure is easy even for a gifted mind, if it encourages its readers to be hospitable to many kinds of excellence, to be respectful before even qualified achievement, it will not have failed in the purpose for which it was written.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME HIGH POINTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NOVEL

The novel as a distinct literary form is the child, the offspring, of modern life. And as modern life has been not always one and the same, so the novel is not an unvarying literary type but has reflected the changes in the conditions of social life which it expresses and from which it sprang.

The following chapter is a diagram, or sketch map, marking some of the main streams followed by the novel in the course of its history. The direction of these streams has been determined in part by the traditions accepted from previous writers, in part by the pressure of the writer's own conceptions, which are themselves reactions upon the circumstances in which the author lives. The novelist usually writes according to some scheme or plan shaping his work, and learned from some one else; but again new ideas and points of view have created new forms so that in the novel ideas and forms react on each other.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* may well be taken as the beginning of a study of this kind, for its central idea well symbolizes the decay and disappearance of those adventurous and marvelous works of fiction which grew out of an outworn way of life, and had become absurd in a world slowly growing into its modern character. The insane mind of Don Quixote was full of fantastic ideas drawn from tales of knight-errantry, which practical reality promptly confuted by the irony of fact. And the facts were the plain verities of an order of things in which the necessity of working for a living and conforming to the ordinary demands of society were not only inexorable but were more significant and interesting than dreams of sorcerers, oppressed damsels, the giant Laurcalco of the Silver Bridge, and the silent squire of Amadis.

Don Quixote is the first notable book on a large scale which embodies the conflict at the heart of the modern novel, the conflict between the world of daily life as it is, and an imagined world, fantastic or noble or beautiful. So much is sure. The reader may not be sure how seriously to take the conflict, how respectful to be to the world within the mind of the Don: is the book a frank criticism and condemnation of un-

reality and self-deception in spirit, and of affectation in literary form, or is it a symbol of the inevitable conflict between the ideal and the real, which are always sundered, but which demand to be united, or is it an expression of the baffled homelessness of the human spirit, which, since it has lost a supernatural guide, can find serenity within the confusion of an alien world only in madness? No matter, for the purpose of perceiving the significance of *Don Quixote* in modern fiction. It embodies a conflict between fantasy and reality, in which reality is victorious, and it does so with an abundance of richly humorous contrasts. It is a loosely strung series of incidents, in which a lovable and irresponsible master and his shrewd, devoted, but ignorant and unimaginative man move about from place to place in a world of many vividly observed figures. It is a many-sided book; a farce, a satire, a tale of adventure, a record of personal disillusion, a humorous juxtaposition of mutually unintelligible characters, a protest of realism against sentimentality, a work in which the moral sublime gilds the sordidness of the actual, an expression of angelic tenderness for feeble and even despicable humanity. It was such a book as a

man of great genius and great nature, born in a time of profound change, could make once in a lifetime, and it has affected the spirit and ideals of a long line of novelists.

In form, *Don Quixote* is an Odyssey, an epic of wandering, in which the hero with his companion beholds many cities and the manners of men, and meets adventure by the way. It is an Odyssey of disillusion and plain and dusty reality, sweetened by a generous humor and ennobled by a sense of the dignity of man.

The next book vital in ideas for the creation of the novel was the *Gil Blas* of Le Sage. This too is an Odyssey, and an Odyssey of disillusion, but not particularly generous or noble; rather penetrating and drastic. It is the culmination of a type, the picaresque story, the career of a youth born in poverty, forced to live by his wits, a hanger-on of society, who passes from patron to patron until he is finally settled in a decent and sober status in life. Le Sage refined the spirit of the picaresque type and enlarged the scope of its satire. His hero (or anti-hero) saw not alone the seamy side of the life of the canon and the physician, and the intimate rascality of the robber, the beggar and the strolling actor, but the weaknesses of the

bishop, the king's minister—yes, even of the prince himself. And he not only sees, but he is taught and trained—not to sheer cynical rascality, and still less to noble idealism, but to tolerance, probity, and efficiency in the school of experience.

Combine these two: write the story of a young man from birth to settled manhood. Inspire into the form of the picaresque tale the generous humor of Don Quixote, so that you can love and respect very weak and eccentric human beings. Take away the mere vulgar humor of rascality. Add the devotion of an attached follower to the wanderings of youth, see the world as it is revealed on the road and at the inn; but set home and order and love in the heart of your hero and turn him finally to them, after he has been taught by the world and by his own stumblings and recoveries. And give your whole story the interest of a plot, loose and large indeed, but clear and firm, by massing the forces working against your hero on one side and those for him on the other, and let them play upon him in his Odyssey. This is the formula of the earliest English novels of the outward type, and this is what Fielding did to form the novel.

This is the formula or framework which English novelists accepted and worked with for a century. Smollett took the form, though not the spirit, from Fielding and made it the means of exhibiting a whole gallery of freaks instead of focusing the interest upon a central figure. It is in a loose way the formula of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. The earlier nineteenth century accepted it, in time dropping out the humble attendant and making the eccentric figures less prominent, but adhering to the general scheme and spirit. Dickens followed it in his earlier novels, those written before he felt bound to interweave a detective plot into his stories to make up for the flagging of his superabundant invention. Scott began with it and Thackeray never gave it up. The novel of youth wandering, seeing much, and being formed by experience, is the formula even of Wilhelm Meister, of René, and Corinne.

Now a form like this is very easy-going, very tolerant and hospitable. You can put into it almost what you please, and as much as you please. Goethe put into it a philosophy of education, Dickens the gusto of oddity, pity for the weak and oppressed, and a plea for a great many definite reforms, and Thackeray a satiric

comment on the falseness and unreality of society. This form accepts laughter more easily than tears, but it does not exclude tears; and it is equally tolerant of sneering laughter and of good-natured laughter. But what you put into it must be vital. The English novelists of the first part of the nineteenth century were negligent of form, had but slight sense even of unity and clarity; they dumped a whole lot into a novel, but they have an untiring force of vision and vital zest, enough fire to set their rubbish aflame and to melt their slag.

But while this novel of wandering young manhood on its journey of adventure to settledness was developed, another type of novel was created that was its exact antithesis. A novel of few characters, brief time, clean-cut plot, fixed society, little change of place, the experience inward, of the soul, intensity of passion, seriousness, woman as the central figure, takes the place of the crowded panorama of figures, the changing scene, the externally lively adventure, the easy-going humor, of the story of the genial but not profound young man.

This is the novel created by Madame de la Fayette, in *La Princesse de Clèves,* and by Marivaux in *Manon Lescaut,* and carried on to

brilliant international success by Richardson, who set the example for Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héliose,* and through him for Goethe's *Werther.* These tales of weeping women and sentimental men, with their reams of letters and volumes of diaries, their redundant pettiness and their cult of delicate nicety, had a great vogue in the eighteenth century. This type of fiction had in it the possibility of a crisper and more finished artistry than the loosely genial tale of Fielding, and contributed to the interest in the analysis of character, to delicacy of sentiment, to emotionalism, to the feminine spirit of the novel. Thus two types of fiction were created in the eighteenth century and handed on for the nineteenth to develop.

But most of these first novels of both types were long,—not only long but enormous; to read them takes weeks of leisurely evenings. And they were not only long but prolix or centrifugal. In the outward epic type there was a constant attraction in scenes by the way and in diverting episodes to lead the writer from his story; in a word, the novel wandered; in the novel of the pains and passions of the soul there was an all but inevitable tendency to wash over the banks in floods of sentiment, to taste

and relish over and over scenes of emotion, to delay on details of demeanor and dress, to elaborate the analysis of casuistry; in a word, the novel was slow.

Miss Jane Austen did the work of shortening the novel and of giving it clear form. Her fosmula is simple. Given an attractive young woman of dignity, grace, and character, a member of the landed gentry in English country society, to get her married to the appropriate (but less interesting) young man in spite of normal difficulties (such as misunderstandings, parental opposition, superficial conflicts of personal qualities, or false gossip). The novel does not stir out of the social group of which the hero and heroine are members, the predestined medium of comedy as Meredith later expounded, a definite social group of civilized men and women conversing on equal terms, in which the spirit of good sense had free play. It is the comic spirit of Miss Austen, critical and discovering, detached and not deeply sympathetic, but scornful only of fools, that gives the interest to her novels. Compared with the earlier novels, her tales allow no place for the variety of humor and the breadth of scope of the epic type, nor for the passion of which the inward

type was capable, but they are more at one with themselves, more sure, more clear, and certainly much more probable.

All these earlier novels are novels governed by the preconceptions of the comfortable middle class—even Dickens's novels, however much their interest is in the humor of the lower class, have middle-class heroes also, who end in comfortable settlement in their natural stations in life.

The novel was also shortened by Sir Walter Scott (his novels seem long now, but compare one with *Clarissa,* or *Grandison,* or even *Peregrine Pickle,* or *Tom Jones!*). But his aims were almost the contrary of Miss Austen's. There was no monotony or restriction in ordinary life for her, for her humorous insight made every turn or contrast of character a source of delighted observation to her caustic mind. But Sir Walter Scott found the life of his day tame and narrow, and his imagination escaped from it into a world of livelier exploit and more picturesque contrasts, which it discovered, or created, in past ages. Middle-class comfort was not sufficiently interesting to him. His "formula" is pretty complicated. He aimed to create a complete, interesting, bygone

society; and the method by which he did so was to conceive of this society as composed of distinct sharply marked social groups;—fishermen, captains, country squires, gypsies, peasants, lawyers, soldiers, kings;—each represented in the extreme, by the most developed instance of its type, the most Saxon of Saxons, the most Norman of Normans, the jolliest of woodland friars, the subtlest of Templars, the most physically powerful and generous of kings; all distinguished in dress, in feature, in speech, in conduct. Thus by this body of extreme types, the sense of the interplay of the various classes of society could be created, and with it a sense of the picturesque and the ample in a diversified social order. In this vivid society a great conflict was at work—one great party or race or social group against another: Saxon and Norman, Roundhead and Cavalier, Highland and Lowland. And to get both sides sympathetically and intimately presented, to "work" the story, Scott created a fairly simple-minded, not to say stupid, hero, open to impressions from both the great forces of the story, vacillating between them, and carried by luck and favor to marriage with an heiress. The great personages in history appear in the background,

are seen through the eyes of the foreground characters, and thus are familiarily presented, without having to sacrifice their character to the exigencies of the plot, as they would be forced to do if they were made the centers of the story. The interest of Scott's novels is in part in their external picturesqueness, but more deeply in a picturesqueness of character, in personalities of boldly marked types, formed by strong and exceptional influences: queens, peasants, fanatics, half-mad people, crusted lawyers, and in general members of small separate social groups, especially of irregular life.

Sir Walter's preoccupation with an imagined condition of life in which the social order presented more salient contrasts than he could see about him and in which more brilliant adventure could be undertaken was an escape from the pressure of the actual. This temper is what most people mean by *romantic* (the word is used in so many senses that it has become an unsafe word, a pitfall, and a means of evading ideas). But in the work of novelists at least the romantic spirit is one of dissatisfaction with things as they are and a reshaping of the world in the imagination. This spirit may vary from a mere frivolous refusal to accept reality in favor of

a sentimental paradise of cheap selfishness, up to the deepest, most passionate pessimism face to face with reality, and a refuge in an ivory tower called art or philosophy; but the spirit is the spirit of reaction against the dullness of an industrial, material, "practical" civilization, and the means of escape is by going into an imagined world.

Now conceive of the method of Sir Walter Scott in representing the past turned upon the contemporary order of life. See the world of men about one made up of a multitude of groups, in the country, in the city, in high society, in retail trade, in the church, in finance, in high politics, and low politics, in crime. See them developing to the extreme of their special type under the influence of the conditions in which they live. Make clear the complex and picturesque order of life by the play of these extreme types upon each other; dress these people in the characteristic clothes of their occupations, put them into the homes they belong in, give all their surroundings, to the grim knocker on the door, the greasy oilcloth on the table, the voluptuous perfume of the pastilles in their boudoirs, the feel of the leather binding of their books of account. Give them their

special manners and oddities of speech. And make of the whole one tumultuous, confusing, varying, but yet solid and interacting total. This is what Balzac did. In his contemporary history he had no need of great personages in the background, or of unheroic vacillating heroes in the foreground. He could make his story a plot typical of possible experience—of the bankrupt's defeated efforts for social success, or of the destruction of a too generous father by heartless daughters in society, so that the large movement of history need have no place in his novel, but the idea of the social group, of the representation of the group of personages formed by its pressure to an extreme of typical qualities, and the abounding local color were all acceptable and usable in his new form of fiction. He was fortunate in the age in which he lived, with its energetic conflicts between old and new forces, and the marked external peculiarities of dress and manner which distinguished social classes, so that he could do boldly and forcibly what a novelist must attempt now in the day of standardized tailoring and standardized etiquette and the intermingling of classes by the cheap auto, more cautiously and subtly.

To write with this full reproduction of the material and moral characteristics of his own age, the truth which any reader might challenge, required that the novelist should be enormously informed about his age, *saturated,* as Henry James put it, in his material, so as to be sure about the least detail of the vast body of externals which he owed to his rapid and omnivorous observation. This saturation in the actual is *realism,* and Balzac by his force and vividness turned the current of the novel strongly toward the realistic direction. Indeed, since his day novelists have seldom been able to depend on the incidental observation of life enlivened by their imagination, but have been conscious students and documentary investigators on a great scale; and the public of this day insists upon an ample, minute, and accurate elaboration of detail in even the short sketches which are printed for their amusement in ephemeral periodicals.

Balzac strives to make his realism more than a technique of surface facts: he strives to imagine and recreate the motives as well as the persons of his farmers, and clergymen, and harlots, and traders. He deals with shabby motives, and petty maneuvers, and mean souls, as they

were seen by him in his full-blooded, wealth-worshipping, vulgar era, and also with simple kindly natures, and noble but narrow or ineffective characters—seldom with heroes. But on this side, on the side of character, and still more on the side of the imaginative sense of the forces that work in human society at large, he transcends the normal commonness of his external setting. He tends to give to the evil forces in society and character not alone a predominance but an energy and a portentousness that personify them into mysterious overwhelming dark realities, and thus create a sense of hellish supernatural might in the tone of his works. And his characters, however petty their objects, pursue them with a tenacity, a fertility of resource, and an abandon that are above common human nature. Thus it is that Balzac creates the strangeness combined with familiarity which are necessary to give interest to his work, for without this dark intensity his people would be insignificant, and his tales monotonous. There is no disgust with life in his writings, rather an enormous fascination, evil and abominable as the course of things may be.

But the step once taken from a romanticism which sought refuge from the tedious bareness

of the modern world in a heightened vision of the past, to a romantic realism which made the actual world abnormally interesting by lending the author's own force and creative power to a wretched clerical intriguer or an avaricious domestic tyrant or a professional criminal must lead on further.

The world is not as Sir Walter Scott saw it; still less as his followers Dumas or Crockett or Sabatini have seen it. Moreover, it never has been as any historical romanticist has ever seen it: history slowly forces open the fist in which the past has held its secrets, and it finds them no secrets. Never has the average of daily life been other than meanly commonplace except for brief moments. And no more has it been as Balzac saw it; never peopled with these tenacious, adroit, subtle, clear-purposed masters of chicane and their generous but feeble dupes. It is not so fascinating even in its evil. And many acute minds have felt that if the novel is significant, it cannot be false to reality. Not merely in its surface and in its documentation, but in its view of character and motive, it must represent that which actually and normally is, in the life from which it is drawn. And that life, two leading novelists of the age, one in

England and one in France, agreed was cramping, creeping, narrow, false, and mean. But with this agreement, and with the concurrent agreement that it must be shown by the accumulation of unfalsified and abundant detail, their harmony ended. It is most instructive to contrast the novels of George Eliot and of Flaubert. For her every life is in its degree a tragedy, for every nature is thwarted by circumstance. Some are destroyed by folly, some rotted by selfish compromise, some dulled by attrition. But the fate of nobler and more generous souls is the most certainly tragic, for by their very ardor and the compulsion of their visions they are doomed to conflict with the unintelligent commonplace which is victorious in the end. And with all these finer persons, and with her baser ones, George Eliot suffers; she only scorns the decent compromisers who get along easily in life. To this conception of the human lot George Eliot was brought by her observation of reality: the evidence seemed to her to show it. And her view was molded and modified by the influence of scientific study. The spirit of science ratified her conviction of the inevitability and inexorability of the working of cause to consequence. It is in their con-

sequences that our acts are immortal. Heaven is making the world better for our having lived in it; and hell is not making it as good as we might. The idea of the chain of the ages, the linking together in a continuous bond of the past, the present, and the future, was one aspect of the working of cause into consequence. The ideas of evolution, of heredity and environment, both formed by the past and both acting upon each other in the present, were strong with her. Again the scientific attention to minutiæ as of the utmost importance, recognition that the atom holds the secret of the universe, the cell holds the secret of life, encourage her realistic scrupulousness and thoroughness in detail. Thus the scientific spirit greatly influenced her ideas and her artistic method.

Flaubert inverts the process of the romantic evasion without changing its personal philosophy; he avers with George Eliot, but even more sweepingly and unrestrictedly, that human life now and ever is fixed in a contemptible and disgusting order of things. Even the rebels are contemptible; the common way of life deserves scorn; and if we but see it rightly we shall scorn it. So with valiant and painful logic, and exhausting conflict with the means of represen-

tation he, stroke by stroke, defines in clear outline his picture of life and then fixes it in a transparent enamel. In *Madame Bovary* is reached a sort of culmination of what the novel began by Richardson had striven to be—the novel of woman, with few characters, narrow range, definite theme, and energetic singleness of purpose. It has added to the earlier types a milieu, the narrow provincial circle in which the confined life of the character could be led, with a mere vague sound of the sea of humanity outside heard at intervals from a distance. The characters are every way indistinguished, unless the progress of Madame Bovary's downfall is a distinction, and the energy of perception which alone keeps it from the commonplace is due to the author's bitter and agonized but unsympathetic contempt. In it one who loves color, brilliance, refinement, beauty, paints drabness, dreariness, vulgarity, roughness. It is an artist's book, for it appeals to those who like to see how the thing is done more than to those who read a book in order to have an experience and to carry away an impression. The experience seems to most people self-contradictory and the impression futile. As Henry James puts it, the characters are too insignifi-

cant for such a weight of meaning, but of course that is why they seemed important to Flaubert; the fact that human beings generally are so full of strivings beyond themselves, that their strivings are insignificant and that they themselves are insignificant, is the most significant thing in the world.

It is a commonplace that the nineteenth century was an age in which science made a victorious and impressive advance in many fields. This advance was as notable in great generalizations as in detailed knowledge and in practical application: it was of course impressive to the imagination and captivated the minds of thinking men. Its method, the assiduous collection of observed fact, bold but tentative conjecture, and severe testing by scrupulously controlled experiment, was fascinating by the richness of its results, and the flexibility of its application. The assumption of an ordered, interrelated, fixed, determined universe likewise at once appalled and attracted the imagination. And the new character of nineteenth-century science, interested in the variation and the individual, and not simply in the type, its living sense of genetic progress, all made it a much more picturesque as well as a more hu-

manly significant thing than the equally triumphant but less intimate science of the seventeenth century—which in its day had likewise enthralled the minds of creative writers.

George Eliot in English literature owed her fatalistic philosophy to the sense of a determined order of things, related by cause and effect, and her idea of the human lot was of a conflict between the individual nature,—itself determined by heredity,—and circumstance, likewise created by the past. The ideas of evolution, of the oneness of an ordered world in which man is but a part, of the conflict between the individual and his surroundings, were shaped for her by her ideas of what science meant, and she strove to be scientific in her effort to be accurately right in the detail of fact, and obedient to the laws of human nature, sincerely and obediently ascertained by observation.

The importance of detail, of being saturated with the facts of life, and of attention to individual differences, as well as of the laws of probability in human nature were doubtless confirmed in novelists by the effects of science. All this is to be found in many writers, proportionately to their skill and patience and

power—notably in Zola. But with him the efficacy of the scientific method in its field caused it to be an obsession; and he propounded the idea of the novel experiment. Given the data of a character (i.e., an imagined character), its heredity in detail, its individual difference, and its circumstance, bring it into relation with another character, or characters—with the accumulated facts about that character—and you have an *experiment*. Observe the reaction, as the scientist does in the laboratory: thus by the method of the scientific imagination, the novel of real life is created.

Of course this is only a figure of speech: in a laboratory an artificial set of simple circumstances is created, by which the number of points to be observed is limited to a few; and the things that happen are seen, heard, and felt, not imagined. If new things are brought together in a laboratory nobody knows in advance just what they will do, so the experimental novel presents no real experiment; it appeals for its confirmation not to measured fact never before seen, but compelling because it is there, before you, but to the common psychology of man, which tests its imaginative creations by its power of sympathy, and by human experi-

ence. But the thesis of Zola, though unsound as a thesis, presents vigorously, though in paradoxical form, the analogy between imagination and science, recognized by Aristotle, who perceived that a soundly built narrative involves a process carried through to its end under the law of probability or necessity. Zola adds the conviction that there is no law but that of necessity. He strives to convince by an overwhelming documentation, laboriously acquired, and often laboriously presented. He builds his milieu with patient thoroughness, and strives to account for his characters by the same minute justification. And like the other realists he sees life in general selfish, mean, lustful, avaricious, oppressive, revengeful in motive, disappointing, trivial, disgusting in result. Only he cannot abide just there without going further. Unlike Flaubert, he does not isolate his little group; such is not the way of nature for men as he sees them. Men live in crowds, and belong to castes and orders that reach far and wide. Modern life (except for the sheer peasant bound to the soil) is a town life, and a life determined by mechanical industry—mass life. The effects of improved methods of transportation and of machinery are

translated in his works into the imaginative life of his characters. Here he reaches a pitch of intensity far from the commonplace of realism. The factory becomes a living and terrible force, a monster; the city lives, the life of a smoke-breathing and filth-spitting dragon; evil powers reign, disgusting and obscene, it may be, but vastly and even magnificently dreadful. As Balzac is charged with romanticizing the evil force of human nature, so Zola romanticizes the evil in the world at large, until it becomes almost an entity, as fascinating as a horned and tailed devil. Indeed, it is here that his power lies, for in his painful documentation and laborious prolixity he sets a model for conscientious tediousness which has been all too often followed; but his terrors of the factory, his crowds, and his sense of enveloping evil are magnificent and not so easily imitated.

Thus in the heart of every realist from Balzac to Zola there is found nestling a little devil of romance: they had a fatal passion for the interesting, and they idealized even in their utmost efforts to be merely accurate.

So valiant and convinced devotees of nature as it is proclaimed themselves *naturalists:* realists, that is who accept or discover the data of

the nature of men and things just as an external scientific investigation reveals them to exist, and who do not go beyond nature thus conceived for any of their effects. Human beings are more contemptible than Balzac saw them: they are not clever or even consistent of will in evil; they are swayed by their nerves and their physical life and the resultant emotions; there is little hunger for color and richness, even of a tawdry kind, such as Flaubert imagined; no great zeal for freedom or self-realization, no profundity of conscience, such as George Eliot made central. The factory is not a monster. It is a dull pile of brick with a smoke-stack. And men are what they are: one as good or bad as another, quite insignificant in themselves, facts of nature, valuable as raw material only for art. These are the doctrines of de Maupassant, the minuteness and vivacity of whose observation, and whose thorough consistency in the working out of incident are incompatible with the successful completion of a novel, that is of a work of fiction on the large scale, and who fails accordingly for the lack of character, but whose short stories brought pessimistic realism to its logical conclusion, and affected greatly the method of later writers, who

find themselves compelled to emulate his brilliant precision of detail. How different his finished, learned, individualizing touch from the generalizing hasty method of description in Fielding!

From France the leadership in realistic fiction passed to Russia. Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century had a society presenting more vivid contrasts than even those imagined by Scott, or by Balzac. The old aristocracy, uncontrolled, haughty, vigorous, sometimes ignorant: the new aristocracy, suddenly brought into contact with the most sophisticated ideas of a finished civilization, an intelligentsia, relatively small in numbers, vividly self-conscious, radical, intoxicated with ideas, a vast ignorantsia, set in tradition, crude, emotional, laborious; serfs just liberated in a crowded country, and with famine ever close upon them, modern industry impinging upon an economic system of immemorial antiquity, eager humanitarians, violent destroyers, satiric conservatives, corruption, germination, and a solid unleavened mass of stupidity.

Russian realism was from the first thorough. The conditions of Russian life presented a quite sufficient force of contrast to require no arti-

ficial heightening in order to produce an effect. So the Russians made no attempt to create an idealism of evil, to compensate for the discarded picturesqueness of the romantic school, but with an apparently frank naïveté presented the picture of Russian life as they had conscientiously striven to see it truly and completely.

The scope of Russian realism is broad, touching upon all sorts and conditions of men, not contenting itself with the severe analysis of a separate group, but aware of multitudes, of various occupations, of a multiform society, of the concerns of a nation, or of the problems of human society. Even if the main action is confined to a family group in an old homestead, or to the people of a village, the horizon is as wide as that over the Russian steppes. The unity of the greater Russian books is therefore not mechanical or exact, but quite real, for the Russian novels turn upon some central problem of life, or some great issue, which affects the fortunes of all concerned: as *Dead Souls* treats of the depravation of all classes of society, who eagerly cheat the government which is itself corrupt, or as *Crime and Punishment* treats of how crime is conceived in the criminal's soul,

and how the soul is regenerated, and still more of how all orders and ranks of men are corrupt, and *War and Peace,* and *Anna Karenina,* all seriously agonize over great, fundamental human questions against a background of vividly conceived and deeply imagined Russian life.

The Russian realist, approaching his creative work with these preconsiderations in his mind, —the problems of the nature of war, of marriage, of crime,—is desperately in earnest in grappling with his subject and ruthless in following the course of his observation and logic to its extreme conclusions. Thus he is absolute, fanatical if you please, in his ultimate utterances upon his problems, and unmeasured. His philosophy is not external to his imagination, but blended with it, so that his conclusions upon life have the effect of something experienced, not applied.

The Russian realists are neither contemptuous of life or of humanity, nor evasive of it. They cannot be regarded as indifferent to moral questions, for moral questions are the very foundations of their narratives, but they have no condemnation for sinners. They pity them, they try to understand them, and they pity all

mankind and try to understand them; they pity not from a love but as part of mankind: as themselves both weak and uncertain. This attitude is inconsistent with critical humor, which is not an element in the greater Russian novelists after Gogol.

With consistent sincerity and thoroughness the greater Russian novelists set as the central theme of their plots an action growing from their own real interests, and not an action conventionally accepted as the interesting theme for the public. So they do not make getting young people married the business of their stories as Dickens and Scott did, though the real concerns of these writers were, the one with national conflicts, and the other with the injustices to which the weak are subjected. Gogol's great satiric novel centers in an ingenious and corrupt scheme for borrowing money, which is a touchstone of the honor of all kinds of people to whom the opportunity of assisting the adventurer in his fraud is presented. Though the structure is loose, and the main interest of the tale is in the satiric sketches of Russian types for which the plan of the book gives an opportunity, yet the central thread of narrative is a vital part of the novel. This large,

loose, open structure is characteristically Russian, and the detached completeness of the studies of Russian life set an example for his successors. But Gogol's Cervantic humor and lightness of touch are not in the general stream of tendency which the later Russians followed.

It is no wonder that the Russian novel suddenly by its force and breadth in the presentation of a reality so arresting swept the more limited fiction of the western world into its orbit as mere satellites.

Turgenev's central ideas, spirit, and method, as has been often remarked, are like George Eliot's, the futile efforts of special personalities to live a full and rational life, thwarted by the obstacle of society, and quite as much by their own lack of insight or character; his are gravely sad books but not torturing ones. Turgenev's Western European culture detached him from Russian partisanship, and made him sceptical of Russian movements; but the very detachment and skepticism of Turgenev, which kept him from being, like George Eliot, the supporter of a cause, produced the greater harmony of spirit in his work, and the greater firmness in his presentation of character. In the development of the novel, perhaps

the most important contribution of Turgenev is his awareness of a changing social order. Scott conceives a complete social order, though an imaginary one; Balzac constructed a social order, typical of his day, and symbolically representative of it, though warped and exaggerated. Zola knew the world as remade by steam and telegraphs, and strove to represent successive generations, but mechanically. But Turgenev knows the reality of change and conflict as one generation succeeds another; he watched Russian changes, and followed an impending revolution. But he was always skeptical of revolutionists and unhopeful for the future. His failure to take a side, to join heartily with those even dimly and confusedly working for the future has caused him to be eclipsed for the moment among his own countrymen, who blame him for doing nothing for the cause of man. But the permanent imaginative interest of mankind is not in causes, however great, but in human personalities, and the truth and subtlety of Turgenev's psychology, and the beauty of his work made him sure of a place among the great world artists.

Dostoevsky, like his compatriots, has the sense of society, of mankind living in communi-

ties, but his imagination is concentrated upon the victims of society. He is concerned, moreover, not alone with its victims as they suffer pain, but as their natures are warped and mutilated by the evil pressure of society: with the criminals, the insane, the drunken, the ill-regulated. In his most completely wrought and best-known work (*Crime and Punishment*) he follows with penetrating sureness and slow painful steadiness the working of the mind of an ineffective student who commits a sordid murder. He is consoled in his misery of soul and helped back to healthy contrition and to new manhood by suffering, which a prostitute teaches him to bear. She is driven to the street by the needs of her family. We come to know a drunkard, not wholly without self-respect, who yet will steal even his daughter's wretched earnings to gratify his appetite for drink. And these figures, and a multitude more, are made credible to us by a forceful imagination, an extraordinarily revealing psychology, and a profound sympathy, which no evil can destroy. The result is harrowing, for these psychological paradoxes are compelling individually, but as a whole bring the reader into a state of things which it would seem must suddenly ex-

plode into chaos, and the tension of mind and soul necessary to hold it all together is torturing. Zola's world is ugly and terrible, but we can stand outside it and dislike it; but the reader is in Dostoevsky's world, and cannot escape or evade it. But ultimately he cannot believe in it as a whole.

Tolstoy is the ultimate Russian realist: if the others are thorough he is still questing after all is seen and done, if they are broad he is still striving to include more after all is included, if they are pitiful he is still feeling for the utter pain inherent in life itself, if they are ruthless he is fanatic. He is perhaps the first great consistent realist. He has a vital eagerness for the living reality, a zest for all the "goings-on" of his own life, and for the life of the souls of men, and for all human activities, and for the life of nature in the burst of spring and the quiet shine on the spreading river, such that he needs no artificial heightening to give interest to the simple fact. Unlike Balzac he needs no galvanic energy of soul in his personage, unlike Flaubert no beautiful dreams of a more vivid world, unlike Zola no select force of sin to give life a vitality beyond itself, unlike Dostoevsky he need not make his way with a shielded candle into a strange cavern of

human nature in order to find the human soul wonderful. Unlike George Eliot or Turgenev he does not even find it requisite to deal with beings set by any exceptional qualities against their natural environment. He deals not with extreme types of ordinary tendencies, but with quite normal ones, and if they seem strange, it is only because they are seen in the light of thought, as scientific study reveals the marvelousness of ordinary things.

Tolstoy has the power to carry out the object aimed at by Scott, Balzac, and Zola of creating a whole society in motion, of envisaging a whole nation rising like a tide into the flood of war and ebbing into peace. And like the tide the rising waters run out and fill backwaters, and flood creeks, and follow sinuous beaches and carry up driftwood, so that one who tries to follow the outline of the changing shore is confused by its complexity and its instability. Yet the whole moves all together, and altogether draws back again. In Tolstoy's vast narratives his victorious imagination sweeps along the whole multitude of scenes and incidents, little and big, so that a reader who can once move with him feels a vigorous exhilaration in the sense of achieving a great experience.

Tolstoy has the courage of realism which

without excitement confronts even the ugliest facts as they present themselves: in the physically disgusting,—scabby feet, or the odor of corruption,—or horrible deeds of cruelty and vice,—murder and adultery,—or the performances (more humiliating to those who cherish a sense of the dignity of human nature) of scolding lovers, yawning gamblers, and flattering guests in a parlor, but he does not rely upon such elements for spice. They are part of total reality, are presented as they occur, are recorded, make their impression and take their place in the enormous interrelated plexus of experience which makes up the total of his books.

Although Tolstoy has this sense of humanity as a whole, and is able to communicate the vision of it, and although he has a special imaginative sense of the value of the unlettered man—the peasant and the common soldier—the real problems of his works are the problems of sensitive, educated, prosperous men, and the central figures of his novels are persons of his own order, Russian aristocrats. Only the prosperous and the intelligent are ordinarily conscious of the problems of life, and have freedom to strive to solve them. These problems are

the problems of their inner lives: how to attain peace within, how to live the good life, the life that shall be adequate not for outer achievement but for inward satisfaction. And here is the source of the doubleness which makes Tolstoy interesting. On the one hand he has a zest for life, for all life, so that he contemplates every passion joyfully, and presents it as impartially as Shakespeare; on the other, he has a profound feeling of futility, the result of a disappointed search for permanence and permanent meaning in all this. The eager growth of delight is withered by drought from the hell of emptiness or blasted by the freezing wind of death. From the first these two spirits were in Tolstoy, a fury of life, and a fascinated conviction of nothingness. This is the source of innermost intensity in his books: the eager quaffing of full life, the passionate clinging to what seem to be—what *are*—joys, the disillusion. No ultimate reconciliation was ever achieved by Tolstoy; but he taught a kind of faith, a sort of Buddhism. The very struggle to be, merely to be as an individual, involves infinite conflict, with all the universe, with all one's intimates, with all one's belongings, with all one's self. It is pain, therefore, in itself.

Pleasure involves pain. The ideal of life, therefore,—always infinitely far from us, but to be striven for all the more—is absorption in something not ourselves, in the sinking of the conflict of self in some vastness. But Tolstoy's own nature was too ardent for the suppression of desire to be ever a real ideal for him. So every work of his ends really in an unanswered question, there remains a gnawing doubt in his surest affirmations, a conflict which is a human conflict, every man's conflict, the conflict of life, between the two parts of his double nature.

From the beginning novels have treated character, usually in conflict with circumstance, seldom in harmony with it, sometimes compromising with it, sometimes overwhelmed by it, always reacting to it, in fear, or desire, or wrath, or disdain; brought to consciousness and to life by it at least. But this constant interrelation is in general obvious, often material, usually conscious. The heroes of novels fight or fly or cringe or manipulate or are overwhelmed, to their own knowledge and by forces made plain and often measurable in the story. But there is a subtler relation, insisted upon by Wordsworth, and developed into a system by a more refined psychology of recent years. Our

characters are not created fundamentally by our conscious and reasoned actions, but in a subtler way: by the hearing of a strange sound from the hills, giving us a sense of a mysterious, alien, but real life, in the hidden places of the rocks, by the vision of a moving shadow on the waters, by a nurse's tale, by a mother's kiss, by the first sight of shed blood, by a deceit, by the fragrance of a blossoming hedge, by a speck of sunshine under a tree, by "little, nameless, unremembered" things. Wordsworth put forward this psychology as a basis of his poetry and his ethics. Nature formed a "lady of her own" by a multitude of unspoiled impressions

> "Felt in the blood and felt along the heart."

He had a theory of education in which the creation of sound emotional response to the world, was central, not analytic intellectual discipline, and an ethics and a politics of simplicity to correspond.

The same conception underlies the more sophisticated fiction of Walter Pater, whose Child in the House is formed by scarcely conscious associations with forms of refined beauty, and whose Marius the Epicurean likewise is a char-

acter created by the responses, not of intellect but of imagination and emotion, to cults and symbols, to beautiful things of nature and art, to terrors and pains, and to the life of action. Touches and suggestions of similar conceptions are important in many writers, in George Eliot, in Meredith, and in Hardy. Marcel Proust goes further than any of these earlier writers in this view of human nature. To him, all our mental life is constituted out of such successive impressions and the memory of them; thus our emotions are canalized into courses by the past, and each new impression attaches itself to the body of emotion created by the past. To understand ourselves we must enter into the research of time gone by, which thrills and echoes, though apparently forgotten, in each new experience. So in very truth

> The child is father of the man,

not as a germ, or as a potency, but as a creative force through experience.

And these impressions are our all, our treasure of life. We know nothing by immediate contact, we have knowledge only of impressions, and what we call other people are to us merely the memories of earlier emotional experiences

threaded upon a name or a form, and united in our minds by the unity which our mind gives them. An inspiration, an ambition, every desire, every purpose, is of the same kind—it is the reflection of our past upon the clouds about us, and made desirable by a name or sentiment of something not yet part of it—a mystery. When we, as we believe, "get what we want"—when desire changes to possession, hope to realization, aspiration to success—then our experience is not the old vision, but something new, surprising, and contradictory, so that every realization destroys the very desire that created it. Thus life is a constant rhythm of illusion and disillusion; but no matter how often repeated the illusion is all-powerful over us even when we recognize it as an illusion. We love again only to kill love by possession, desire only to disappoint desire in realization, strive only to be baffled by success, for not only is the disillusion inevitable, but the riches of mystery are lost in the platitude of realization. Shut in thus to ourselves, and hungry for a reality always denied us, we have only one road to a reality—to create our visions into works of art, which alone give back to us the reality we have ourselves made, symbolically and incompletely

but really, and constitute us sharers in the one reality of creation.

Another point of importance in the method of Proust is the presentation of characters. As our experience is continuous only of ourselves, one character only can be continuously followed in a work written on his principles, so that a Proust novel must have the form of an autobiography. Other persons are seen at intervals, intermittently, by flashes—as we see them in life. This conception previously guided the brothers Goncourt in their effort for realism. This intermittent view is what we get in actuality—therefore it is the realistic manner in novels. An impressionistic method is therefore inevitable and reasonable in such writings as Proust's. To be sure, a flash may throw a light back on the past,—it may make clear the nature of what has happened to the character in the interval since last it was seen, but it is seen actually as an impression. The character is new, is changed, and thus the flight of time is made clear, not by sequence but by the perception of the result of processes which have worked unseen by us. It is as if we were watching the skipping of a stone in the water. We hardly see the stone, but we see plainly the con-

centric waves circling about where it touches—round and round, and far away. We see the progress, as if the leaps of the stone went out of the book; we know what happens only when it touches. Yet the whole has a progress and makes a line through all the points of contact.

In Proust's own working out of this complex and difficult approach to reality as a basis of fiction, the interest of originality and penetration seems to me greater than the compelling artistic power of the work actually achieved. His style seems to me vitiated by the effort to make that synchronous in language which is in fact synchronous—to bring into a moment the record of what occurred at a moment. Language refuses to achieve this end. The mind receives from language point after point, impression after impression, and refuses to go very far in making these points seem to be instantaneous. Proust's parenthetical and subordinated sentences are artistically wrong—they are inhuman. His attitude, also, is in much of his work the attitude of a detached and amazed observer, and hence he expounds at inordinate length that which the imagination would assimilate and feel, and not make the basis of a disquisition. In his later volumes,

the creator is lost in the scientist, and hence results an unendurable tedium and the destruction of his character as emotional realities.

In such works as his, the very fundamental principle of the book makes it necessary for the whole to revolve about abnormal characters. The capacity to remember the impressions of a hot afternoon in June in an orchard when one was three years old is abnormal: the capacity even to define and recount all the details of any static complete impression is abnormal. But all works of dramatic or narrative art require the admission of some impossible premise, which if once granted the rest may go easily. This analytic, impressionistic, detailed, static method once accepted, has its special powers: especially the presentation of a passion or a habit gradually beginning, taking shape, fastening upon a man, and then in spite of his knowledge of its evil, of his will to be free, fascinating him and controlling him and riding him on to exhaustion or distraction; and in the hands of a master the method has an evocative charm in presenting what might be the most commonplace of incidents. This method is in the trend of much of recent narrative toward the insistence on inevitability and the power of

circumstance over men, the more inevitable that it is exerted so subtly and so unconsciously that the will is not awake until it is already fettered.

The novel has been the chief literary expression of a rapidly changing age: it has been the imaginative embodiment of the new sympathies, the changed ways of living, the extended knowledge, and the altered habits of thought which have followed each other like successive waves for two hundred years. The sympathy of earlier ages would have found no place for the hundreds of peasants and laborers, to say nothing of the incompetents and delinquents and nervous invalids who have been made the central figures of novels since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The background of life has been shifted so rapidly that the conditions of a generation ago can be revived only by a laborious antiquarian. A decade fades from brilliant blue and crimson to a sickly mauve, and a novel ten years old "dates." The more perfect the author's command of the facts of his day, the more certain he is to be inaccurate on the morrow, so that a novelist's documentation has to be constantly renewed; a fresh world of reality is no sooner conquered by the imagination than it must be abandoned. Science barely

camps over night in one place; and the shadowy caravans of philosophy waver and flicker like mirages on the changing horizons of thought. The systematic study of human nature, the especial subject of the novelist, is controversial and unsettled, divided into factions of irreconcilables, and disturbed by partisan war cries. A novelist is almost compelled to profess some creed, as of behaviorism or one of the many sects of psycho-analysis.

Overcome by the intoxication of these new ideas, the ablest of recent novelists have been too conscious of psychological method and too eagerly doctrinal to rest confidently on their vision of life. They are polemic and expository. They have been so eager to let no human reality escape them that they have expanded their books to vast bulks, and at the same time refined them with exquisite subtlety. From Cervantes to Tolstoy the bigness and the range of novels have put a burden on the form. Can it carry any more? Must it not be renewed by selection, concentration, and above all by a sureness of vision which shall raise the writer above the atmosphere of controversy?

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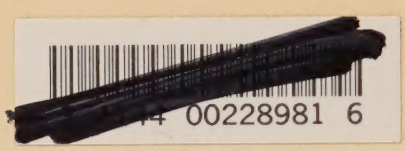
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